Georg Büchner

Danton's Death

Adapted by
Margarete Forsyth & Peter Christian,
with the translation by
Peter Christian

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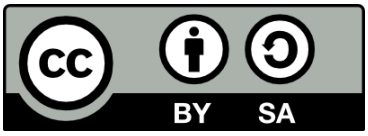
The Rude Mechanicals' production of *Danton's Death*, produced and directed by Margarete Forsyth, played at the Young Vic Studio, London, 5th–28th March 1987.



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About the Play

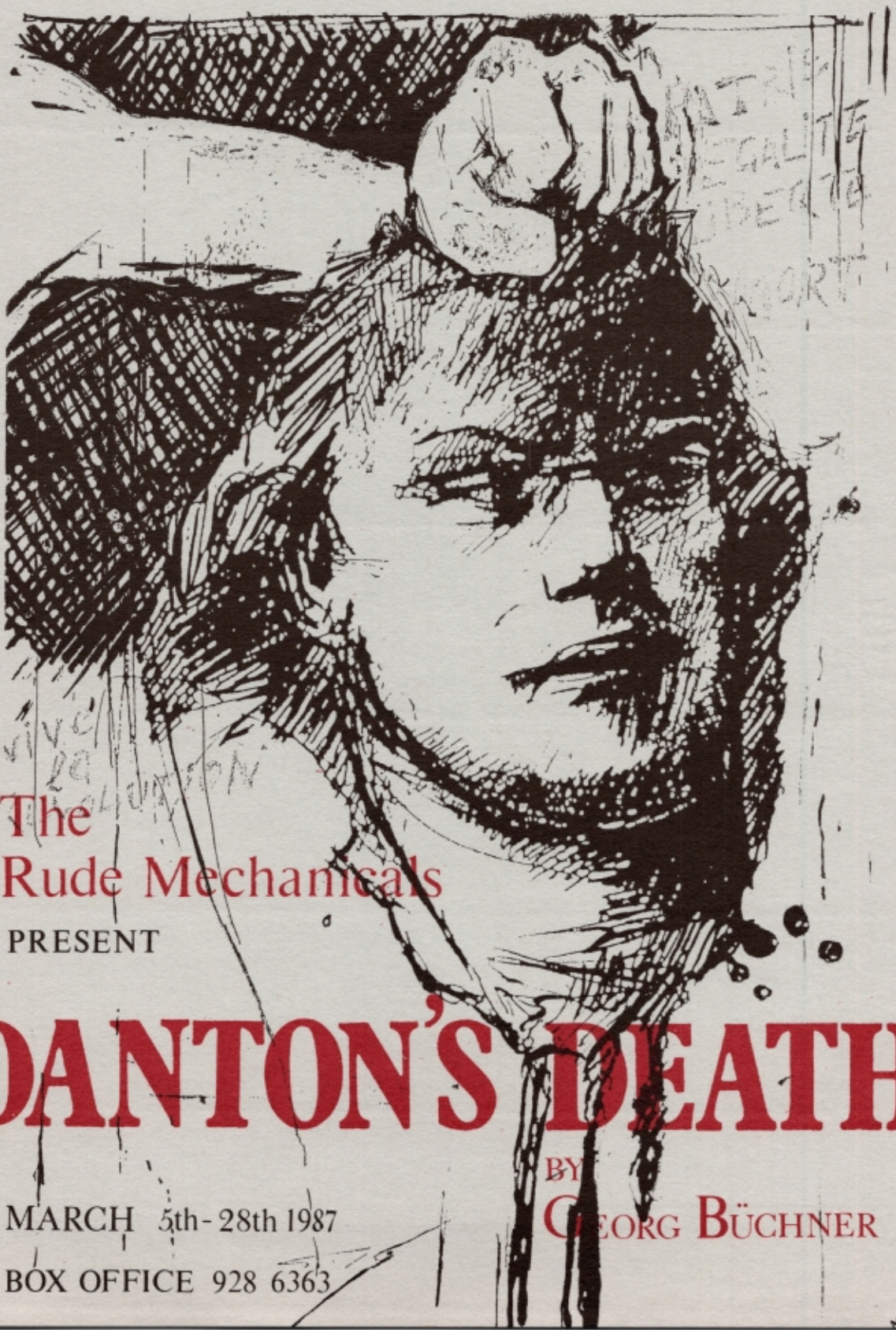
Georg Büchner's *Danton's Death*, written in a few weeks in 1835 is regarded as a masterpiece of German literature.

The four acts cover events during eleven days of 1794 — in the later stages of the French Revolution — as the ruling faction, headed by Robespierre, attempts to get rid of Georges Danton and his moderate followers, the last opponents of their brutal methods of government.

The play examines Danton's disillusionment with his own political role, his final confrontation with the Committee of Public Safety, and his reaction to the certainty of his execution. This personal story is set against a debate on the justification of political violence and against a wider background of the People's dissatisfaction at the failure of the Revolution to improve their lot.

Danton's Death, with its wealth of historical detail and allusion, and its cast of mostly historical characters, is difficult to stage for a modern audience. Based on a new translation by Peter Christian, the adaptation was made for Margarete Forsyth's production at the Young Vic Studio in 1987 and was well received by the critics. It sought to prevent the play coming across as merely a museum piece by clarifying the historical context without detracting from the play's theatrical effectiveness. The Full Text and Playscript are published here together so that readers (and directors) can see exactly how we adapted Büchner's text.

The Young Vic Studio



The
Rude Mechanicals
PRESENT

DANTON'S DEATH

BY
GEORG BÜCHNER

MARCH 5th - 28th 1987

BOX OFFICE 928 6363

Arts Council Funded

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Preface

This edition of *Danton's Death* publishes the versions of Georg Büchner's play about the French Revolution that were made for the production by The Rude Mechanicals at the Young Vic Studio, London, in March 1987, produced and directed by Margarete Forsyth.

It is a truism of *Danton* commentary that the play reads well but is problematic to stage. The translation itself was my work, as close to the original German as possible, but in that form difficult for a live audience to follow, with many historical allusions and confusing minor characters. The director and I therefore worked together to produce a version comprehensible to a modern audience, who could not have the knowledge of the period that Büchner could expect from his contemporary readers. We also, incidentally, had to make sure that it could be performed by a cast of sixteen, all we'd have room for in the small space — quite a challenge in a play with crowd scenes and political meetings.

The very complimentary comments of reviewers suggested that we had a good measure of success in trying to make a difficult play accessible. *The Spectator* called it "a triumph of small-scale theatre", *The Guardian*, perhaps a little over the top, "a great improvement on the original".

This book presents what is an unusual (perhaps even unique) offering for a difficult play. Here is not just a translation (the Full Text) or a stage version (the Playscript), but both. Readers will not be misled into thinking that things that were the adapters' decision actually come from Büchner; producers, directors, actors, and drama teachers will have a stage-ready script, but one where they can easily check how Büchner's original has been adapted in making it performable. Indeed, with the full translation immediately to hand, anything we cut or changed can readily be restored.

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technical barrier to reuse, the book is issued free of any digital rights management.

Margarete Forsyth and I had long planned to publish our *Danton's Death*, but there were always more pressing matters, and her unexpected death two years ago meant that I have had to take sole responsibility for publication. Nonetheless, since I worked from her own annotated rehearsal script, I feel sure that the result is not too far from what she would have wished.

Peter Christian, April 2026

Two Rude Mechanicals

Margarete Forsyth (née Graffam) was born in Nuremberg and grew up in Germany, the USA, and Ethiopia. At the University of Erlangen she met and married aspiring actor Julian Forsyth. She came to London as a Lektorin at Goldsmiths' College before starting her theatrical career as director and set designer

After three productions at the Young Vic Studio with her first theatre group, The Rude Mechanicals, she and Julian took over the Greenwich Studio Theatre to run seasons of neglected European classics to consistent critical acclaim. She also taught at many of London's drama schools.

Later, forced by serious illness to curtail her theatre work, she ran her own translation agency. She died in the summer of 2024.

Peter Christian was born and grew up in London. He took a degree in Modern and Medieval Languages at Clare College, Cambridge, and later studied at the University of Marburg. The first part of his career was spent at the University of London, initially as lecturer in medieval literature and historical linguistics, then as an IT specialist.

After thirty years, he left academia to become a freelance writer and lecturer on the use of the Internet in genealogy, publishing countless articles and several books including *The Genealogist's Internet*, the standard guide to the field. He is a Fellow of the Society of Genealogists.

He and Maggie Forsyth were colleagues at Goldsmiths' and collaborated in The Rude Mechanicals. He is currently engaged in curating her theatrical legacy.

- Margarete Forsyth: London Productions 1982–1999
- Peter Christian: Publications

From the Reviews

"Margarete Forsyth's production is a triumph of small-scale theatre. She has been considerably helped by Peter Christian's fluid translation, which cuts out some of the historical detail. Whatever may be sacrificed by way of allusion is compensated for by the production's swift narrative movement and intelligent political debate."

Christopher Edwards, *The Spectator*

"Peter Christian and Margarete Forsyth do everything in their power to achieve a sharper definition of the central roles and themes, with the result that, for once, anyone with a modicum of intelligence and of historical knowledge should be able to follow what is going on."

Francis King, *The Sunday Telegraph*

"A great improvement on the original, which always seems to read well but never really confronted the problems of staging."

John Vidal, *The Guardian*

"Mr Christian's paring of the text... leaves us with something as moving as one recollects from the original."

Edward Pearce, *The Daily Telegraph*

"Peter Christian's new, most speakable translation."

Giles Gordon, *London Daily News*

"The play has been newly translated by Peter Christian, and very satisfying it is, with a gentle touch and a careful focus The long court scenes have been pared and the play emerges stronger than ever."

M.L., *What's On*

"And here, it must be said, the translation achieves a very great sense of the variety, a great sense of the richness of Büchner's language."

Philip Brady, "First Night" (BBC Radio 3)

Introduction

Georg Büchner
and *Danton's Death*

Georg Büchner wrote *Danton's Death* in five weeks in January and February 1835 at the age of 21. His personal circumstances at the time were far from comfortable: he was in imminent danger of arrest for his political writings and wrote the play to raise money for his flight into exile. But though written in haste, the play is the result of a much longer preoccupation with the French Revolution, and with revolutionary politics in general.

A year earlier he had written to his fiancée, Minna Jaegle:

> I have been studying the history of the Revolution. I felt myself almost crushed by the cruel fatalism of history. I find in human nature a disgusting sameness, and in human relations an ineluctable force, given to all and to none. The individual is only foam on the wave, greatness a mere accident, the mastery of genius a mere puppet play, a ridiculous struggle against an iron law, to recognize it is the best one can do, to master it impossible… I have accustomed my eyes to blood. But I am no guillotine blade. 'Necessity' is one of the words of damnation with which man is baptized. The verse: "For it must needs be that offences come but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh" [Matthew 18,7] — is terrifying. What is it in us that lies, murders, steals?

This letter contains the germ of *Danton's Death*. Indeed it contains the germ of Danton's character, the disillusioned revolutionary who sees the inevitability of history and the meanness of human existence, yet refuses to be bowed by either, even though his self assertion changes nothing and has no significance outside itself. Practically every image in this passage reappears in *Danton's Death*, and

the last two sentences are spoken, word for word, by Danton shortly before his arrest.

At first sight it seems merely presumptuous of a twenty-year-old to project himself into a great political leader, but in spite of his youth, Büchner had already passed from youthful idealism, through political activity, to pessimism.

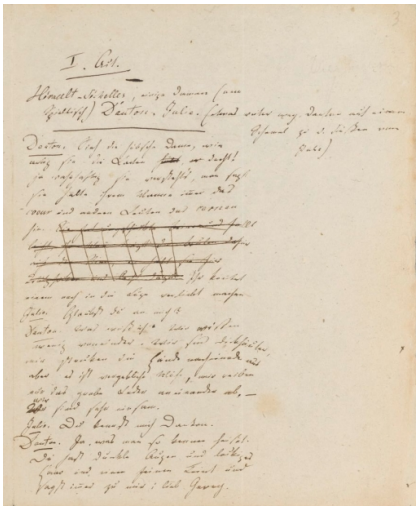
He was born in 1813 into a medical family in Goddelau in the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt, and as a child heard about the Revolution from his father's army stories and reading aloud to the family. One of the books he heard read from was Johann Konrad Friederich's 30-volume *Unsere Zeit* ("Our Time", subtitled "Historical Overview of the Most Notable Events 1789–1830"), which was to be a significant source for *Danton's Death*.

As he grew up he developed a passion for literature and an equal passion for liberty. Leaving school at eighteen to study medicine in Strasbourg, he found a liberal city influenced by the republican ideals of the French Revolution. While he was a keen and gifted student, devoting much time to his studies, he also began to take an active and energetic part in political debate. In Strasbourg, too, he met his future fiancée, Minna Jaegle, the daughter of the pastor in whose house he lodged.

Returning to Germany in 1833, to complete his studies at the University of Giessen in order to qualify, he seems to have been horrified and depressed by the political backwardness of Hesse-Darmstadt, where a repressive constitution allowed few civil rights. He threw himself into political activity, founding the underground 'Society for Human Rights' ('Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte'), dedicated to the political enlightenment of the people. He also wrote a revolutionary pamphlet, *Der Hessische Landbote* ('The Hessian Courier') which, prefaced by instructions on how to avoid being punished for reading it, called on the Hessian peasantry to acknowledge their lack of rights and their economic servitude to the nobility, and to be prepared to rise up when a leader appeared. The pamphlet was printed in July 1834 and distributed through various liberal organizations, but was handed into the police by peasants afraid of being found in possession of such inflammatory material.

After a tip-off the police arrested one of Büchner's friends with 150 copies, which led to a search of Büchner's lodgings. Fortunately, nothing was found to incriminate him, and when the university term was over he returned to his parents' house in Darmstadt, where he devoted himself anew to the Society for Human Rights.

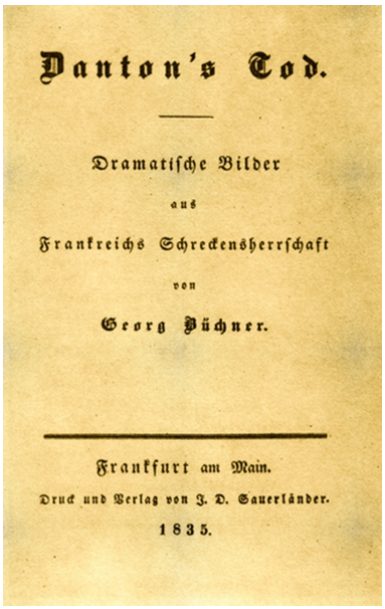
In January 1834 he had begun researching the French Revolution in earnest. In October he started borrowing books from the library in Darmstadt's Residential Palace, excerpting historical accounts of the period. His first library loan was Adolphe Thiers's *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, which provided him with a basic structure of events for the play as well as the political controversies. This he then fleshed out with political material from the family's *Unsere Zeit*, supplemented by subsequent library loans. The private scenes were probably the last to be planned.



Büchner's manuscript: Act 1, Scene 1

It is not known what drafts he had worked on during this period, but by mid-January 1835 he was ready to prepare a final version. Fearing imminent arrest — he was twice summoned to appear as a witness for friends who had been arrested — he wrote secretly in his father's laboratory with his brother as look-out. He completed it in five weeks.

On February 21st he sent the finished manuscript to the critic Karl Gutzkow, begging for quick publication so that he would have the funds to escape to France and avoid arrest. Gutzkow immediately began arranging for publication, initially as a series of extracts in the periodical *Phönix* and then, in July, as a book with a print-run of 400 copies from the Frankfurt publisher Sauerländer. To avoid censorship, Gutzkow had removed or toned down the sexual elements, much to Büchner's dismay.



Book cover

By the time the first extract appeared in *Phönix* Büchner was already in exile — on March 9th he had fled to Strasbourg. The expected warrant for his arrest was issued on June 13th. In exile, he gave up his political activity, but continued his literary career, writing the comedy *Leonce und Lena* and starting work on *Woyzeck*, and the novella *Lenz*. He now also devoted himself energetically to anatomical research, which led in October 1836 to a lectureship at the University of Zürich, and in December he was officially granted political asylum by the Canton of Zürich.

However, the brilliant academic and literary careers which seemed to lie before him were soon cut short. On February 9th 1837, probably weakened by overwork and leaving *Woyzeck* and *Lenz* unfinished, Büchner died of typhus at the age of twenty-three.

Danton's Death and the French Revolution

The Fall of the Monarchy — The Republic — The Rise of the Jacobins — The Terror — Georges Danton — Danton the Radical — Danton the Moderate — The Trial and Execution of Danton and his followers — Danton's Death and *Danton's Death* — After *Danton's Death*

The Fall of the Monarchy

When the French Revolution began with the storming of the Bastille on 14th July 1789, it was the response of the populace to the failure of Louis XVI and his ministers to solve France's economic problems and heed the grievances of the people. By 1791, Louis had been forced to renounce absolute power in favour of a Constitutional Monarchy under a newly formed Legislative Assembly, which put power firmly in the hands of the middle classes. However, continued failure to solve the problems facing the country gave rise to a second revolution on 10th August 1792, when the Paris mob deposed the King in the storming of the Tuileries. In the following months, elections were held for a new assembly, the National Convention, whose first act, on 22nd September 1792, was to abolish the monarchy and proclaim the republic.

The Republic

The new Republic was far from unified and harmonious. The upheaval and heady idealism of revolution had given almost every group in French society the hope that the Revolution would be the vehicle for *its* aspirations, whereas there was very little hope of reforms which would satisfy both urban and rural interests, both the devout and the rationalists, both those who lamented the fall of the monarchy

and those who demanded the King's execution. In the Convention these splits were expressed in the opposition and indeed animosity between the moderate Girondists and the more radical Jacobins. The first nine months of the Republic were marked by factional disputes in the Convention, with groups trying to discredit, outmanoeuvre or take advantage of the others, and a consequent failure to solve any of the economic and social problems that had given rise to the Revolution.

To start with, the Girondists (though not a ruling party in the modern sense — they had no majority in the Convention or monopoly of government posts) held the upper hand, occupying the main ministries, as they had done under the Constitutional Monarchy. However, their first defeat at the hands of the Jacobins was not long in coming, when the Jacobins succeeded in getting the Convention to vote for the King's execution, which most Girondists opposed. The Girondists were quite unable to solve the economic crisis, and their moderate policies seemed to many to mean tolerating the enemies of the revolution, whether they were the royalists and counter-revolutionaries or merchants taking advantage of food shortages. Instead, they tried to retain popular support by declaring war on neighbouring states, hoping that the French people would forget their hardship in a wave of patriotic enthusiasm. By March 1793, France was at war, at least in principle, with Austria, Britain, Holland, Prussia and Spain, not to mention the war against the counterrevolutionaries on its own soil.

The Rise of the Jacobins

An important extra-Parliamentary group were the radical sans-culottes, a highly politicised upper working class, who had been at the forefront of every insurrection in the capital. Although no political groups in the Convention could take their support for granted, no group could expect to survive without it. This support turned out to be crucial to the success of the Jacobins.

By May 1793, seeing the need for a unified government to take tough measures to deal with the failure of French armies and the hardship of the people in the face of food shortages and rising prices, the Jacobins decided to eliminate the Girondists from the Convention. The Jacobin coup d'état took place between 31st May and

2nd June 1793, when the sans-culottes, incited by the Jacobins, forced a large number of the Girondist deputies from the National Convention. In effect this was a third revolution, now against an elected but moderate government, and it marks the beginning of the Jacobin dictatorship.

The Terror

The success of the Jacobin dictatorship depended on its ability to get control of policy out of the hands of the National Convention, and the means of doing so was the Committee of Public Safety. This had been set up before the Jacobin coup, as an executive body subject to the Convention, and at first was not under exclusive Jacobin control. However, as 1793 wore on, its twelve seats were increasingly taken up by Jacobins such as Couthon, St Just and Robespierre, the unofficial leader of the Jacobins. Gradually the Convention was persuaded to vote the Committee more and more powers, increasing its independence. Although the Committee of Public Safety was originally reelected monthly by the Convention, from September 1793 it had full legal autonomy, appointing its own members, and in October it declared an emergency Revolutionary Government which suspended the Constitution 'until peace'. Given the severe problems of food shortage, war and sporadic civil war, there was something to be said for such drastic measures. But with absolutely no legal or constitutional checks on the revolutionary zeal of the Committee, this is usually regarded as the start of the most repressive stage of the Revolution, the Terror.

By December 1793 the Convention was forced to pass laws giving the Committee of Public Safety absolute control over all other administrative bodies and public officials in France, through a system of agents who reported to the Committee every ten days. The Law of Suspects, passed in September 1793, allowed the Committee and its appointees to arrest and try anyone on mere suspicion. The Revolutionary Tribunal, set up by Danton in March 1793 to try the enemies of the Revolution, conducted trials which soon lost all semblance of legality, as the Committee of Public Safety nominated judges and jury, and the verdicts were reduced to acquittal or death. Inevitably the number of those executed or imprisoned, often entirely arbitrarily, rose to unprecedented heights.

However, by the end of 1793, the Jacobins were again under threat. The anarchistic Hébertist party, Jacobin extremists, succeeded in arousing popular support by attacking the Jacobins as too moderate in their economic measures. And the Jacobins were in fact forced to pass new economic laws to pacify the sans-culottes after an insurrection in September. Since the sans-culottes were the only group who could pose a real threat to Jacobin dictatorship — the Terror could do little against mass insurrection of its own major supporters, particularly if supported by a strong sans-culottes army — in December the main Hébertists were arrested. It is their execution on March 24th 1794, reported by Camille and Lacroix in the opening scene of Büchner's play, which marks the political starting point of *Danton's Death*.

Georges Danton

Danton, one of the great figures of the Revolution, started out in politics in the revolutionary Cordelier Club, and stands out from his contemporaries as being radical in his ideals but quite prepared to settle for something more moderate if it was workable.

Danton the Radical

He first came to power as a representative of radical revolution, in the period of Constitutional Monarchy, when he was appointed Minister of Justice in August 1792 to appease the sans-culottes after the storming of the Tuileries. He was a founder member both of the National Convention and of the Committee of Public Safety. That he could be quite as ruthless as any other Jacobin when the occasion arose, is shown by his role in the September Massacres of 1792, when the sans-culottes invaded the prisons and slaughtered Royalist prisoners. Danton, as Minister of Justice, either allowed this to take place (while saving some of his friends), or actually organized it. Büchner takes the latter view and has Danton haunted by the memory of those killed at his instigation.

Nonetheless Danton was a good deal more humane than many of his fellow Jacobins, and consistently favoured compromise, only resorting to radical measures when they were political necessities, or when his own political survival

depended on it. He also seems to have been something of an opportunist and was involved in a number of shady financial deals while in office. He undoubtedly took bribes, yet remained uncompromised. As one historian put it, those who bribed him did not get value for money.

Danton the Moderate

During the latter part of 1793 Danton seems to have become increasingly disillusioned with the repressive measures of the Terror, and at the same time more concerned with his own private affairs. Returning to Paris towards the end of 1793, after a period of convalescence at his country home, he found the growing moderate opposition of similarly disillusioned Jacobins, notably Camille Desmoulins, Hérault-Séchelles and Lacroix, looking to him for a lead. As a man of great charisma, a powerful orator, popular with the sans-culottes, and the sort of politician who might get the moderate deputies to support him against Robespierre, his new position, however reluctant, at the head of moderate opposition posed a new and pressing threat to Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety.

The Trial and Execution of Danton and his followers

Danton's Death recounts the story of the last eleven days of Danton's life fairly accurately. Danton seems to have been unwilling to take any action, counting on compromise, believing that his contribution to the Revolution made him invulnerable, and that his popularity with the people made him dangerous to attack. However, persuaded by his followers to meet Robespierre, he was unable to save the situation. After his failure to do so, the Committee of Public Safety and the other Committees decided to have him arrested. He was warned by friends and offered a place of refuge, and spent much of Sunday March 30th wandering around Paris trying to decide whether to flee or remain. He remained, knowing that he risked almost certain death, and was arrested that night, as were several of his followers, and all were taken to the Luxembourg prison.

The notification of his arrest caused uproar in the Convention next day. Between 2nd and 5th April, there were three hearings in the Revolutionary Tribunal for Danton and his followers. In spite of the fact that he was tried along with forgers

and speculators, that his accusers never appeared and that he was denied witnesses, Danton's oratory and personality almost turned the tide. However, a young prisoner named Laflotte revealed a counter-revolutionary plot by General Dillon in which Danton, certainly without his knowledge, was implicated. This sealed his fate. The third hearing began at 8.30 on the morning of 5th April 1794, and by dusk that afternoon Camille, Hérault, Lacroix, and Danton had been guillotined.

Danton's Death and *Danton's Death*

Not only are the events of Büchner's play historically accurate, but many of the political speeches, aphorisms and slogans were taken by Büchner from historical sources. In particular, Danton's resignation to his fate and even eagerness for death, which might seem a playwright's invention, are historically attested, as are a number of Danton's key statements. In fact most of the characters in the play are historical personages — the exceptions are Simon, his wife and the three whores — and act at least consistently with their known characters, though of course almost all the personal material in the speeches is Büchner's invention.

However, though generally very accurate in his picture of events, Büchner did make some conscious changes of historical detail for dramatic purposes. For example:

- Hérault-Séchelles, who went to the scaffold with Danton, was in fact arrested at the same time as the Hébertists and therefore could not have been present for the events portrayed in Acts 1 and 2. (There is an echo of the correct timeline in Hérault's welcoming Danton to the Luxembourg at the start of Act 3.)
- The message from the Jacobins of Lyons (Act 1, Scene 3) was delivered as a letter, not in person, and read out at a different meeting from Robespierre's speech at the end of that scene.
- Büchner gives Danton and his followers a final night and the following day in prison to ponder their fate after they have been condemned, whereas they were in fact sentenced and guillotined on the same day, which was the usual practice.

Büchner has also changed the fates of the two wives. Although Lucile's cry of 'Long Live the King' is authentic, it was the prison plot which was actually the reason for her arrest; and, unromantically, Danton's wife (in reality called Louise), did not commit suicide but survived the Revolution to marry an aristocrat. In fact she was still alive when Büchner was writing her death scene.

After *Danton's Death*

Louise Danton, Thomas Paine, and Louis-Sébastien Mercier are the only individuals portrayed by Büchner to come out of the Revolution relatively unscathed. Indeed, Mercier's *Le Nouveau Paris* and *Tableau de Paris*, published after the Revolution, are among the sources Büchner used in his research. Within the next year, all the other historical characters alive at the end of the play had either been exiled to the colonies or, in most cases, guillotined. The public prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville, was the last man condemned to the guillotine by the Revolutionary Tribunal before it was dissolved in May 1795. In particular, Danton's prediction that Robespierre would share his fate within six months was to come true within three. Robespierre's execution on 28th July 1794 marked the end of Jacobin rule and the end of the Terror.

Danton's Death: Notes on the Main Political Groups

Royalists — Girondins — Jacobins —
Hébertists — Dantonists — Sans-Culottes —
Revolutionary Clubs

There were no political 'parties' as such in the French Revolution, but rather a number of loose groupings, not to mention a large number not even committed to any particular group. In the National Convention, for example, voting patterns of the deputies, even of committed Jacobins or Girondists, varied considerably from issue to issue, certainly far more than in modern European parliaments, and there were many independent deputies. Though universal suffrage was proposed from time to time, voting remained the prerogative of men paying more than a certain level of tax, leaving all women and much of the working class disenfranchised.

Royalists

Sought restoration of the monarchy. Never a serious threat to the Revolution in Paris, but the basis of counter-revolutionary movements in the Provinces, and often in alliance with other European powers, none of which could afford to condone the Revolution. The real threat posed by the Royalists was not great (they were not very well organized and had little money), but fear of Royalist plots was a constant factor in Revolutionary politics, and a useful weapon for stirring up anxiety among the people. Also, a convenient slur against anyone less keen on the revolution than those in power.

Girondins

Moderate revolutionaries, with power-base in the provinces. First revolutionary group to hold office, with ministerial positions under the Constitutional Monarchy. One of two main groups in the National Convention. Many voted against execution of Louis XVI. Their ministers seem not to have been specially competent and their failure to deal adequately with the economic and military problems of France not only sealed their own political fate, but made it appear that any moderation was a threat to the Revolution. They were also unfortunate that their influence in Paris, the seat of the National Convention was rather slight, which meant that it was not difficult for the Jacobins to persuade the Paris sans-culottes to expel them from National Convention in Jacobin coup of June 2nd 1793, though still strong in Provinces.

Jacobins

Committed revolutionaries with Paris power-base in the Jacobin Club. Mostly middle-class (many were lawyers) but saw their interests as identical to the working-classes, that is, threatened by monarchy, nobility and the concentration of the nation's wealth in the hands of a minority. Most extreme group apart from the Hébertists, voted for execution of Louis XVI. Though at first they could not be sure to outvote more moderate deputies in the National Convention, they managed to control the Committee of Public Safety from its inception in April 1793. By the end of 1793, they had not only brought about the expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention, but also managed to have laws passed giving practically all executive power to the Committee, leading to a Jacobin dictatorship. This was effectively destroyed in the coup of July 1794.

Hébertists

A fanatical offshoot of the Jacobins, led by Jacques Hébert, extreme radicals, very populist, more fanatical than the Jacobins. Never serious contenders for power, but had strong support among the sans-culottes, which made them a threat to the Jacobins. Basically anarchists: anti-Church, anti-property. Nicknamed 'les Enragés'. Their execution on March 24th 1794 marks the political starting point of the play.

Dantonists

This is what they are called by historians, but at the time they were called ‘les Indulgents’. Nor was Danton really their leader, but rather a figurehead with the requisite revolutionary credentials and personal charisma to carry through their aims. All were originally committed Jacobins — Danton, Hérault and Lacroix having been on the Committee of Public Safety — but as the crises of 1792/3 became less urgent they saw less necessity for repressive measures and proposed moderation. The last political group to be destroyed by the Jacobins before their own demise.

Sans-Culottes

So-called because they wore long trousers rather than the knee-breeches (‘culottes’) of the wealthier classes. The grass-roots radicals of Paris and the provincial towns, politically aware and active. Often thought of as solidly working class, but included a large proportion of artisans and small shopkeepers (i.e. employers and the self-employed rather than employees) Many were literate and, though not wealthy by any means, they could obviously afford to devote much of their time to political activity at a time when most of France was having trouble getting enough to eat. In fact, they were not very much more radical than the Jacobins, but had a different view of the political organization of the Republic: whereas the Jacobins thought power should be exercised by the people through representative elected assemblies, the sans-culottes favoured the referendum and popular insurrection as the expression of the people’s will. Also, the Jacobins were more moderate in their actual policies than in their rhetoric from the sheer necessity of trying to run a country, much of which did not favour the very urban ideals of the sans-culottes.

In spite of these differences, the support of the sans-culottes was essential for any group trying to hold on to power. The Girondins never had this and were deposed by a coup d’état. The Hébertists were executed because the Jacobins saw them starting to gain more and more sans-culotte support, which would have meant the end of Jacobin ascendancy. In turn, however, the sans-culottes were often

manipulated by those seeking power — because of their very readiness for insurrection. Organized in forty-eight local Sections making up the Commune of Paris.

Revolutionary Clubs

The main revolutionary clubs were political debating societies, often with a collective view of important issue. Many laws passed in the Convention originated in motions from the clubs. The most important was the Jacobin club, with a network of affiliated clubs throughout France. Danton and Camille started their revolutionary careers in the Cordelier club. There were some women's clubs. There was little scope for the lower working class, who could not afford the time off work to attend meetings.

The French Revolution: Timeline

1789

May 5	Meeting of the Estates General to solve economic crisis
Jun 17	Commoners in the Estates-General proclaim themselves the National Assembly, the nations' representative body.
Jul 14	Storming of the Bastille. Start of the Revolution.
Aug 26	Declaration of Rights.

1790

Jun 19	Abolition of Nobility.

1791

Sep 14	Constitutional Monarchy established under Legislative Assembly.

1792

Aug 10	Storming of the Tuileries by Commune of Paris. King's Swiss Guard massacred. Effective overthrow of Monarchy.
Sep 2	Verdun falls to Prussians. Panic in Paris.
Sep 2–6	September massacres: suspected Royalist prisoners massacred as potential 'fifth columnists' by volunteers organized by Danton.
Sep 10	Danton elected to Convention, resigns from Ministry.
Sep 21	First meeting of the National Convention.
Sep 22	Abolition of Monarchy. Republic begins.

1793

Jan 21	Execution of Louis XVI.
Feb 7	Royalist and Girondin uprising against Jacobins in Lyons and other cities.
Mar 10	Revolutionary Tribunal set up by Danton.
Apr 6	Robespierre founds Committee of Public Safety. Original members include Danton, Lacroix, Barère, later joined by St. Just, Couthon, Hérault-Séchelles, Collot, Robespierre.
Apr 15	22 Girondins expelled from the Convention.
May 31	Jacobins urge anti-Girondin rising in Paris which leads to:
Jun 2	Jacobin coup: Expulsion of remaining Girondin deputies from Convention by sans-culottes.
Jun 24	Convention accepts the so called Constitution of 1793, mainly drawn up by Hérault-Séchelles. (Never in fact operative.)
Jul 13	Marat assassinated by Charlotte Corday. Sans-culotte uprising, instigated by Hébertists, to force Convention to take economic measures.
Sep 6	Henceforth Committee of Public Safety nominates own members and thus no longer subject to Convention.
Oct 9	Republican forces under General Ronsin recapture Lyons.
Oct 10	Revolutionary Government decreed by Convention.
Oct 16	Marie Antoinette executed.
Oct 31	22 Girondins executed.
Dec 4	All authorities subordinated by law to Committee of Public Safety, which thereby legally takes over from Convention as highest authority.
Dec 5	Camille Desmoulins publishes first edition of *Le Vieux Cordelier*.

1794

Mar 14–16	Hébert and Hérault arrested.
Mar 24	Execution of Hébert and followers. **[Act 1, Scene 1]**
Mar 29	Last meeting of Danton and Robespierre. **[Act 1, Scene 6]**

Mar 30	The combined Committees agree to Danton's arrest.
Mar 30	Danton hears of intended arrest but decides not to flee. **[Act 2, Scene 3]**
Mar 30/31	Arrest of Danton and followers during night. **[Act 2]**
Mar 31	Convention notified of Danton's arrest. **[Act 2]**
Mar 31	Danton taken to Luxembourg prison. **[Act 3, Scene 1]**
Apr 2	First Hearing in Revolutionary Tribunal. **[Act 3, Scene 4]**
Apr 2	Danton transferred to Conciergerie prison. **[Act 3, Scene 7]**
Apr 3	Second Hearing. **[Act 3, Scene 9]**
Apr 4	Prison plot uncovered. **[Act 3, Scene 6]**
Apr 5	Third Hearing (early morning).
Apr 5	Danton and followers guillotined (dusk). **[Act 4, Scene 7]**
Apr 13	Executions of Lucile Desmoulins, General Dillon and Hébert's widow, all convicted of conspiracy.
Jul 27	Anti-Jacobin coup. Robespierre arrested.
Jul 28	Robespierre guillotined, along with St. Just, Couthon and others.
Jul 29	71 Robespierrists executed (largest mass execution). End of Terror.
Nov 12	Jacobin Club closed.

1795

Apr	Deportation of Barère, Billaud & Collot ordered.
May 7	Fouquier and Herman executed.
May 31	Revolutionary Tribunal abolished.
Oct 7	Rule of Directory begins.
Nov 10	Bonaparte deposes Directory in *coup d'état*.

Adapting *Danton's Death*

In the summer of 1986, newly-formed as The Rude Mechanicals, we were busy planning our season of German classics at the Young Vic Studio. The first offering was to be a revival of Margarete Forsyth's well-received production of Goethe's *Faust, Part I*, and we needed to select a play to follow.

Our choice fell on *Danton's Death* (*Dantons Tod*), Georg Büchner's play about the eleven days in the French Revolution leading up to the execution of Georges Danton at the guillotine. There were several translations available and the first step was to decide which was best suited to our proposed production.

Danton's Death in English

There is no doubting that it is a challenging play to translate if the intention is to present it on stage to a modern audience. A straight and accurate translation, however desirable in principle, would produce a text sometimes dense with historical references meaningless to anyone who hasn't done their own reading on the French Revolution — some of the political speeches are baffling, if not downright incomprehensible to anyone but an expert. A reader can be given help in the form of footnotes and commentary, but an audience needs to understand in the moment. Whatever happened, therefore, we would be working with an adaptation.

The obvious choice was between James Maxwell's 1959 version for the Lyric, Hammersmith, and Howard Brenton's for the National Theatre in 1982, texts recently adapted by established dramatists for a modern audience, and therefore up-to-date and tested in performance.

We soon saw, however, that neither of these would suit our production. It did not require detailed study to identify problems, or, to be more precise, textual deviations from the original which we were reluctant to adopt.

The first speech of the prompter Simon in Act 1, Scene 2, castigating his wife for supporting their daughter's prostitution, hints at the extent of the issues. Our version, as literal as possible, says:

> "You whoremonger, you wrinkled pox-pill, you worm-eaten apple of sin!"

Brenton has:

> "Panderess! Pimping clap pill! You dose on two legs! You maggot-packed old bitch! You apple rotten with sin."

The word "pimping" is a questionable substitution of a completely different word, and certainly an unnecessary repetition after "panderess". Two of the insults are Brenton's invention, not Büchner's. In the original, Simon accuses his wife of pimping their daughter, Brenton adds an accusation that she has venereal disease herself. Illogically, then, Brenton presents Simon's wife as both a carrier of venereal disease and its cure.

Maxwell is even further from Büchner here:

> "Ha! Long live the Republic! — Ah! Filthy Traitress! — Aristocrat lover!... worm-eaten apple of sin!"

Simon's first words here are pure invention. His wife is now not a pimp or a pox-pill but a "traitress" and an "aristocrat lover". Even if Maxwell had legitimate concerns about the possible censorship of sexual content by the Lord Chamberlain — still a risk at the period when he was writing — Büchner characterises the girl's clients as "young gentlemen" and offers no suggestion that they are aristocrats. To brand her mother as a class-traitor is uncalled-for.[1]

Of course, as dramatists in their own right, Maxwell and Brenton, in each case working closely with a director, are fully entitled to draw out some aspects of the text at the expense of others (something impossible to avoid in any production of the play, of course) and to develop their own vision for the material. To be fair, Brenton characterises his text as a "version", merely based on a translation by another (Jane Fry, his wife). Nevertheless it seems unfortunate that, whatever the merits of these texts as theatrical experiences, audiences of later productions

which use them or readers of the published texts might think that all the words were Büchner's work.

For our own purposes, not only did we feel reluctant to be beholden to someone else's liberties with the text, but we were also reasonably confident that we, an academic linguist and a German director, could produce a version which managed to be dramatically effective while staying closer to what Büchner actually wrote. Of course, any new version would of necessity introduce *some* changes, both to structure and wording, but surely it need not lead to such extensive rewriting. And, in the end, the very positive remarks from the reviewers seemed to vindicate our position.

The first task was to produce as faithful a translation as possible, regardless of stageability, so that we could take an overall view of what we would need to change. Then the director and I worked to adapt that translation with the aim of ensuring that everything in the rehearsal script was readily understandable. In this we were greatly helped by her husband Julian, who, as an actor, was ready to try out particularly the longer political speeches and warn us if our version would be difficult to deliver or was not yet sufficiently clear. And, of course, further refinements were made during rehearsal, as the director worked with the cast.

Historical Allusion

The issues facing any performance text are considerable. The play was written in 1834 and 1835, just forty years after the events it seeks to portray. Büchner did not need to worry that his readers or audience would have difficulty with references to probably the most momentous event in recent history.

The play in fact represents a striking innovation in historical drama: it is based on detailed period research — Büchner's reading has been comprehensively documented, and perhaps as much as a fifth of the text consists of direct quotations from or paraphrases of published historical sources. This is partly the great strength of the play: it is about a real revolution, and these references give one a sense of a rich and real world beyond the stage, a multiplicity of ideas, individuals, factions and events never shown, yet which motivate the characters

and elucidate their situation. But for non-historians, perhaps familiar only with the Storming of the Bastille, Robespierre, and "Let them eat cake", this very strength becomes a substantial barrier to understanding. Even *A Tale of Two Cities* does not offer much preparation for *Danton's Death*. The central problem for any production, therefore, is to find a way to convey the characters' shared knowledge and common experience to the audience without turning the play into a lecture.

If you've bought a ticket to a play about the French Revolution, you are probably not going to be surprised to hear Robespierre referred to as "the Incorruptible". But when Hérault in the opening scene and Danton in Act 4, Scene 5 mention the "Advocate of Arras", you would be forgiven for failing to recognise this, too, as a reference to Robespierre. In that same opening scene Philippeau talks, without further explanation, of "adding a few noughts to Marat's calculation". To us this is an entirely opaque remark, unless, that is, you have already done your French history homework and know that Marat talked of killing five hundred Royalists to save the lives of half a million innocent citizens. Whereas the Robespierre reference is effectively just "elegant variation" and can easily be paraphrased or cut, the point about the Committee of Public Safety's willingness to have people put to death is too important to lose, and so here, sad to say, the only solution is to add an explanatory sentence.

Classical References

A similar gap is apparent when considering the many classical allusions. The leaders of the Revolution were educated men in a period when education meant a knowledge of classical languages, literature and history. Revolutionaries frequently looked back, particularly, to the Roman Republic, and the speeches of the period are full of classical allusions, presumably then widely understood. Büchner can assume a similar knowledge of Latin literature and Roman history among his own contemporaries forty years later. Some of this remains unproblematic for us — for example, the repeated mentions of Brutus as one who fought against tyranny — but others require specific textual knowledge.

The first street scene (Act 1, Scene 2) sees the theatrical prompter Simon compare himself to Virginius and ask for a knife. Nowadays, it is probably only readers of Livy (Book 3, Chapter 44) who will recognise this as a reference to Lucius Verginius's killing of his daughter to defend her from shame. We have generally preserved these in the playscript: often the general intent is clear, and here Simon is obviously threatening to kill his daughter for shame. Also, it is important not to lose this aspect of revolutionary thinking and rhetoric, even if the exact classical reference is not always well-known.

But in other cases, a cut seems to be the only option. For example, there's no point leaving an audience baffled when a character is referred to as Aristides (Robespierre in Act 1, Scene 2) or Anaxagoras (Chaumette in Act 3, Scene 1). And when Robespierre addresses the Jacobin Club with, "Just recently we read an unashamed parody of Tacitus. I could answer with Sallust and play Catalina" (Act 1, Scene 3), I suspect even classical scholars might scratch their heads — which passage in Tacitus exactly, and why would copying Catalina be a fitting response? [2] On the page, this is stuff for footnotes, but it is not obvious how to explain these to a live audience. It is worth noting that each main character comes across as very fond of the sound of his own voice, and very often makes the same point in a variety of formulations. Losing one of them to remove a baffling classical reference is of little account in terms of characterisation or the audience's understanding of a speech.

Staging

This was Büchner's first play. We do not know what experience he had of live theatre, though Camille's tirade in Act 2, Scene 3 suggests a caustic view of contemporary productions. He was certainly very familiar as a reader with the classical theatre of Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller from the previous generation, and his play has many echoes of Shakespeare. However, since he never worked with a director or saw his own scenes realised on stage, he could not have been aware of some issues that might cause problems for a director or an audience.

For example, although Camille and Hérault appear in the first scene, we do not learn the names of these two central characters until Scene 5. Some characters, indeed, are never named: there are several who appear and briefly play out their historically correct roles without the audience ever hearing their names and therefore being able to identify them (not something cast members would be happy about, either). To be sure, sometimes this matters little: Dillon and Laflotte are not named on their sole appearance (Act 3, Scene 5), but the point of the scene, revealing the plot to save Danton, remains clear and certainly does not depend on knowing that one of them, Dillon, was an Irish general. On the other hand, the cast list includes a friend of Danton's, Paris, who is nowhere named as such in the dialogue — he is addressed as Fabricius. This is entirely authentic, for he represents the historical Clerk of the Court to the Revolutionary Tribunal, Nicolas-Joseph Pâris, who was nicknamed Fabricius. But who in an audience is to know that if Büchner does not make it clear?

One result of Büchner's detailed research is an admirable attachment to exactly who did what in March and April 1794, a remarkable innovation for a historical drama. This is, of course, important for the main characters. But when it comes to some of the minor historical characters, particularly if they are not referred to by name, this can be problematic for the audience. It is historically correct that Fabre d'Eglantine was guillotined along with the other Dantonists on 5th April 1794 (Act 4, Scene 7). In the play, Fabre is mentioned twice by Robespierre (Act 2, Scene 7) and, unnamed and invisible to the audience, he has two words *offstage* with Danton (Act 4, Scene 5). Finally, unnamed again, he has a single sentence in the guillotining scene. This may be historically unimpeachable, but dramatically it makes no sense: in the climatic scene of the play Fabre is effectively just a random interloper, someone the audience will not recognise as a Dantonist, guillotined along with characters who are the focus of the play. There can be no reason not to cut this part and his single line — if Büchner had been able to give the play more time, perhaps he would have done so himself.

Other minor characters may have important things to say, and so it is a question of whether their words can be safely transferred to someone else. This might seem a risky proposition, something that would confuse the playwright's characterisations,

but since the minor historical characters rarely get to say anything particularly personal, in practice it does not seem to misrepresent the point of view expressed. In the first scene in the Luxembourg prison (Act 3, Scene 1), Thomas Payne has a philosophical discussion with Chaumette and Mercier. These two remain unnamed to the audience and do not appear again. Since the discussion is fundamentally theological rather than political — in fact it seems a rather strange way to begin the second half of the play — there is no great problem in transferring their words to other, named prisoners who have to be in the scene anyway.

Even where discussion *is* political, the clear divisions between the parties generally ensure that this is relatively painless: shifting a political statement from, say, one Dantonist to another is unlikely to introuce a distortion. We felt safe, therefore, in cutting Collot d'Herbois from his two scenes — his lines can be safely allocated to another member of the Committee of Public Safety, someone who necessarily shares his views.

This trimming of the cast has other benefits for staging, too, particularly for productions like ours outside the commercial mainstream. In our own case, we had to be realistic about practical limitations: as a Fringe company with limited resources working on the Young Vic Studio's small ($24m^2$) stage, there were constraints on the number of actors we could employ. Even with judicious doubling, we could not have stretched to casting the nine Deputies, five members of the Committee of Public Safety, and six legal officials that the text demands, while still leaving enough spare actors for crowd scenes. We were necessarily grateful that the need for a comprehensible play and our practical limitations shared a solution.

This Edition

The present publication updates our 1987 work in two ways. Firstly, the text has been checked against the now standard critical edition by Burghard Dedner and Thomas Michael Mayer published in 2000 (the Marburg Edition), and updated in a few places.[3] Secondly, coming back to the play afresh, with access to more recent published commentary, has given me an improved understanding of some of the

more challenging allusions, with what I hope are consequent improvements in accuracy or clarity.

The text of the Playscript is based on Margarete Forsyth's final, hand-corrected rehearsal script from February 1987. It has been modified to reflect the updates in the translation mentioned above, though it omits some changes occasioned by specific casting and staging decisions in our production.[4]

It is now almost forty years since our production opened, but I like to think that neither the translation nor the adaptation has been made redundant by any more recent version. Certainly the published texts of Reddick (1993) and Auletta (2005) are not ready for staging and do not appear to be more accurate (Reddick's is the better of the two from that perspective). Brenton's radical surgery in his revised version for the National Theatre (2010) makes it now only a distant relation to Büchner's original.

A problem with all published versions of the play to date, in fact, is that they can realistically serve only the stage or the printed page, only audience or readers, never both. The purpose of publishing our Playscript and Full Text together here is to overcome this limitation and tackle two issues.

First, it allows anyone wishing to use our adaptation for a new production to see clearly how we have modified Büchner's words and scenes. In addition, a commentary documents the main changes and the reasons for them, making it easy for a director to decide whether to accept particular changes or undo them by referring back to the Full Text.

Conversely, it provides a clear indication for readers coming to the play for the purposes of study that treating an adaptation as solely the playwright's work is problematic, however well executed, however effective as theatre that adaptation might be. In some of the more difficult passages, though, particularly those with historical allusions, readers may find that the Playscript can offer clarification.

A further innovation is that these texts are released under a Creative Commons licence. This means that they can be used and, indeed, adapted by anyone, without

requiring permission or payment.[5] Anyone is also free to publish any version of their own which is based on ours, as long as it is covered by the same Creative Commons licence and our original authorship is acknowledged. The provision of the texts in an open electronic publishing format, unrestricted by rights management, means that, with suitable software,[6] they can readily be edited to suit the needs of other productions or readerships.

And finally, this edition serves to honour the memory of Margarete and Julian Forsyth, who died within a few weeks of each other in the summer of 2024.

The Forsyths, Summer 2023.

Notes

1. Maxwell and Brenton are not the only ones who fail to do justice to this speech. A compilation of all other efforts from the last century shows a regular mixture of poor understanding and a willingness to rewrite, often substantially. Price's version is the closest to Büchner's text.
2. This is taken to be a reference to an article by Camille in his paper *Le Vieux Cordelier*, 25 Frimaire Year II (15 December 1793), though a specific reference to Tacitus seems to be absent. An English translation of the article will be found at revolution.chnm.org/items/show/419.
3. The most accessible online version of the Marburg text was that on the Büchner Portal. It is now available only on the Wayback Machine.
4. We could not, for example, have Danton remarking on the dark eyes of our patently blue-eyed Julie.
5. Otherwise, only Geoffrey Dunlop's 1929 version is out of copyright at present.
6. This book was created with the free EPUB editor Sigil.

Translation Comparison

Should you wonder why we felt a new translation was necessary in 1987 and why it might still be worth publishing forty years later...

Act 1, Scene 2: Büchner's original text:

The first line reads:

"Du Kuppelpelz, du runzliche Sublimatpille, du wurmstichischer Sündenapfel!"

Kuppelpelz	literally, the fur coat traditionally given as a reward to a successful matchmaker; the implication here: pimp.
runzlich	wrinkled (standard *runzlig*).
Sublimatpille	Mercury chloride pill, used to treat venereal disease.
wurmstichisch	worm-eaten, worm-ridden (standard *wurmstichig*).
Sündenapfel	sin-apple.

The published translations

Dunlop, 1927

> "You damaged bit! You wrinkled trull! You wormy sin-apple!"

Spender & Rees, 1939

> "You old pimp, you wrinkled pill, you maggoty apple of sin."

Maxwell, 1959

> “Ha! Long live the Republic! — Ah! Filthy Traitress! — Aristocrat lover!... worm-eaten apple of sin!”

Mueller, 1963

> “You filthy pimp, you haggard poisonous pill, you worm-eaten apple of sin!”

Price, 1971

> “You brothel-madam, you wizened old pox-pill, you maggotty Eve’s apple!”

Schmidt, 1971

> “Thou panderer, thou wrinkled contraceptive, thou worm-eaten apple of sin!”

Griffiths & Clark, 1978

> *Whole scene cut.*

Brenton, 1982

> “Panderess! Pimping clap pill! You dose on two legs! You maggot-packed old bitch! You apple rotten with sin!”

Rappolt, 1982

> “You pimping hell-hag, you wrinkled bitch, you moth-eaten satan's apple!”

Reddick, 1993

> “You miserable pimp, you poxy old bag. you stinking heap of corruption you!”

Auletta, 2005

> "You sickening old hag! You filthy, pimping, poisonous worm eaten apple of sin! I'll finish you this time, I swear!"

Brenton, 2010

> *Whole scene cut.*

Google Translate, 2026

> "You dome-fur, you wrinkled sublimate pill, you worm-eaten sin apple."

ChatGPT, 2026

> "You fur-covered dolt, you wrinkled sublimate pill, you worm-eaten apple of sin!"
> *or a slightly smoother version (keeping the tone rather than literal wording) could be:*
> "You mangy buffoon, you shriveled poison pill, you worm-ridden sinful apple!

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Concordance of Scenes

For the Playscript there was some re-arrangement of the scenes. The table shows how the scenes of the Playscript match up with the Full Text.

Full Text		Playscript
ACT 1		
A Room	1	2 A Room in Danton's House
A Street	2	1 A Street
The Jacobin Club	3	3 The Jacobin Club
A Street	4	The Jacobin Club
A Room	5	4 A Room in the Palais-Royal
A Room	6	5 A Room in Robespierre's House
ACT 2		
A Room	1	1 A Room in Danton's House
A Promenade	2	2 Promenade
A Room	3	3 A Room in Camille's House
Open Ground	4	4 Open Ground
A Room	5	5 A Room in Danton's House
Street outside Danton's House	6	6 Street outside Danton's House
The National Convention	7	7 The National Convention
ACT 3		
The Luxembourg. A Room with Prisoners	1	1 The Luxembourg. A Room with Prisoners
		The Luxembourg. A Corridor
A Room	2	2 A Room
The Luxembourg. A Corridor	3	(Appended to Scene 1)
The Revolutionary Tribunal	4	3 The Revolutionary Tribunal
The Luxembourg. A cell	5	4 The Luxembourg. A cell

The Committee of Public Safety 6 5 The Committee of Public Safety
The Conciergerie 7 6 The Conciergerie
A Room 8 7 The Revolutionary Tribunal
The Revolutionary Tribunal 9 The Revolutionary Tribunal
Outside the Palais de Justice 10 8 Outside the Palais de Justice

ACT 4

A Room 1 1 A Room in Danton's house
A Street 2 (Scene cut)
La Conciergerie 3 2 The Conciergerie
Outside the Conciergerie 4 3 Outside the Conciergerie
The Conciergerie 5 4 The Conciergerie
A Room 6 5 A Room in Danton's house
La Place de la Révolution 7 6 La Place de la Révolution
A Street 8 La Place de la Révolution
La Place de la Révolution 9 La Place de la Révolution

About the Texts

My original translation was based on the text in *Georg Büchner. Werke und Briefe* (DTV, 1965), which was itself based on the Insel Verlag's 9th edition, edited by Fritz Bergemann (1962).

For this publication it has been checked against the Marburg edition of Burghard Dedner und Thomas Michael Mayer (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), now the standard critical edition of Büchner's works, and a few minor changes made. The Marburg text is most readily available in print as *Georg Büchner. Dantons Tod* (Reclam, 2014). The free online version previously available on the Büchner Portal will now be found archived on the Wayback Machine. A more complex edition, with textual variants, manuscript images, and a wealth of supporting material, will be found on the Marburger Ausgabe Digital site.

From the translation the director and I worked on producing an adaptation to serve as an audition and rehearsal script. During rehearsal a number of further changes were made, all recorded in the director's hand-corrected master copy. The Playscript presented here is based largely on that master and therefore represents, with reasonable accuracy, what was offered to the audience.

The reasons for presenting here both Full Text and Playscript are discussed in Adapting *Danton's Death*.

Danton's Death

The Playscript

Adapted by
Margarete Forsyth &
Peter Christian

from the translation by
Peter Christian

with assistance from
Julian Forsyth

Characters

ACT 1
SCENE 1: A Street
SCENE 2: A Room in Danton's House
SCENE 3: The Jacobin Club
SCENE 4: A Room in the Palais-Royal
SCENE 5: A Room in Robespierre's House
ACT 2
SCENE 1: A Room in Danton's House
SCENE 2: Promenade
SCENE 3: A Room in Camille's House
SCENE 4: Open Ground
SCENE 5: A Room in Danton's House
SCENE 6: Street outside Danton's House
SCENE 7: The National Convention
ACT 3
SCENE 1: The Luxembourg. A Room with Prisoners
SCENE 2: A Room
SCENE 3: The Revolutionary Tribunal

SCENE 4: The Luxembourg. A cell
SCENE 5: The Committee of Public Safety
SCENE 6: The Conciergerie
SCENE 7: The Revolutionary Tribunal
SCENE 8: Outside the Palais de Justice
ACT 4
SCENE 1: A Room in Danton's house
SCENE 2: The Conciergerie
SCENE 3: Outside the Conciergerie
SCENE 4: The Conciergerie
SCENE 5: A Room in Danton's house
SCENE 6: La Place de la Révolution
Notes on the Playscript

Characters

Deputies of the National Convention

GEORGES DANTON
LEGENDRE
CAMILLE DESMOULINS
HERAULT-SECHELLES
LACROIX
THOMAS PAYNE

Members of the Committee of Public Safety

ROBESPIERRE
ST. JUST
BARERE
BILLAUD-VARENNES

HERMAN, President of the Revolutionary Tribunal
FOUQUIER-TINVILLE, Public Prosecutor

PARIS,a friend of Danton
SIMON, prompter
His WIFE
DILLON, a General
LAFLOTTE
JULIE, Danton’s Wife
LUCILE, Camille's Wife

Prostitutes

ROSALIE
ADELAIDE
MARION

Citizens, prostitutes, deputies, executioners, etc.

ACT 1

SCENE 1: A Street

SIMON'S WIFE and others queuing for bread. SIMON enters.

SIMON: (***hitting his wife***) You whoremonger, you wrinkled pox-pill, you worm-eaten apple of sin!

WIFE: Hey, help! Help!

People come running.

PEOPLE: Pull 'em apart! Pull 'em apart!

SIMON: No, leave me, Romans, I'm going to smash this bag of bones to pieces. You Vestal!

WIFE: Me a Vestal! That'll be the day!

SIMON: "From your shoulders I will tear your robes.
Into the sun I'll cast your naked corpse."

You brothel bed, there's lechery lurking in every wrinkle of your body.

They are separated.

CITIZEN: What's the matter?

SIMON: Where *is* the maid? Tell me! No, I can't use that word. The girl! No not that one either. The woman. Not even, not even that one! There's only one name left for her, oh, it chokes me. I've no breath to utter it.

CITIZEN: That's good or the name would stink of brandy.

SIMON: Old Virginius, cover your bald head — shame sits upon it like a raven, pecking at your eyes. Give me a knife, Romans! (***He sinks to the ground.***)

WIFE: He's normally a good man, he just can't hold his drink.

SIMON: You're the vampire's tongue that sucks my lifeblood.

WIFE: Leave him to himself, this is where he gets sentimental; it'll pass.

CITIZEN: What's the matter, then?

WIFE: You see, I was stood here queuing for bread, you see, 'cos we haven't got any food, you see, and my daughter had gone off round the corner — she's a good girl and provides for her parents.

SIMON: Ha, she confesses!

WIFE: You Judas! Would you even have a pair of trousers to pull up if the young gents didn't take down theirs with her. You brandy keg, so you want to die of thirst when the well runs dry, do you?

We work with all the other parts of our body, why not with that one? Her mother laboured with it to bring her into the world, and she had a bad time of it. Can't she labour with it just as well for her mother, eh? And does she have a bad time of it, eh? You blockhead!

SIMON: Ha, Lucretia! A knife, give me a knife, Romans! Ha, Appius Claudius!

CITIZENS: Yes, a knife, but not for the poor whore! What has she done? Nothing! It's her *hunger* that goes whoring and begging. A knife for the people who buy the flesh of our wives and daughters! Down with those who whore with the daughters of the People! You've got stomach cramps, and they've got indigestion; you've got holes in your jackets and they've got warm coats; you've got callouses on your knuckles, and they've got hands like velvet. Ergo, you work and they do nothing; ergo, you've earnt it and they've stolen it; ergo, if you want to get back a few pence of your stolen property you have to go whoring and begging; ergo, they're rogues and they must be killed.

They've got no blood in their veins but what they've sucked out of us.

They said to us, "Kill the aristocrats, they're wolves!" We hung the aristocrats from the lanterns.

They said, "The King is eating your bread." We killed the King.

They said, "The Royalists are planning to let the foreign armies invade your city." We went into the prisons and cut their throats.

They said, “The Girondins are starving you to death by preaching moderation.” We guillotined the Girondins.

They said, “The Hébertists are threatening your livelihood by stirring up anarchy.” And now we've sent the Hébertists to the scaffold. But they’re the ones who stripped the corpses, and we’re left running around bare-legged, just like before, and freezing.

We’re going to rip the skin off their thighs to make ourselves some trousers.

We’re going to cut the fat out of them to lard our soup.

Let’s go! Death to anyone without a hole in his coat!

Death to anyone who can read and write!

Death to anyone who walks like a toff!

ALL: (***shouting***) Death! Death!

Some of them drag a YOUNG MAN over.

CITIZENS: He’s got a handkerchief!

An aristocrat!

To the lantern with him!

To the lantern!

What, he doesn’t blow his nose with his fingers? To the lantern with him!

A lantern is let down.

Y. MAN: Oh, gentlemen!

CITIZEN: There are no gentlemen here! To the lantern with him!

Y. MAN: Have mercy!

CITIZEN: Just a little game with a loop of rope round your neck!

It won’t take a moment, we’re more merciful than you. We spend our whole lives being murdered by work; for sixty years we hang at the end of the rope wriggling, but now we’re going to cut ourselves loose.

To the lantern with him!

Y. MAN: Suit yourselves, but it won't brighten your lives!

CITIZEN: Well said! Well said!

VOICES: Let him go!

He escapes.

Enter ROBESPIERRE, accompanied by women and sans-culottes.

ROBESP: What's going on here, citizens?

CITIZENS: What do you think? The few drops of blood from the massacres of August and September haven't put any colour in the People's cheeks.

The guillotine's too slow. We need a downpour.

Our children are crying out for bread, and we're going to feed them with the flesh of the aristocrats. Come on! Death to anyone without a hole in his coat!

ALL: Death! Death!

ROBESP: In the name of the law!

CITIZEN: What is the law?

ROBESP: The will of the People!

CITIZEN: We are the People, and it is our will that there be no law, ergo this will is the law; ergo, in the name of the law, there is no more law; ergo, death to them!

CITIZENS: Let the Incorruptible speak!

WOMAN: Hear the Messiah who is come among us to select and to judge.

ROBESP: Poor, virtuous People! You do your duty, you sacrifice your enemies. People of France, you are mighty! But, People, your strokes must not wound your own body; you are killing yourself in your ferocity. You can fall only through your own strength, your enemies know that. Your legislators are vigilant, they will guide your hand, for none can deceive their eyes and none can escape your grasp. Come with me to the Jacobin Club! Your brothers will open their arms to you, we will hold a bloody assize for our enemies.

MANY VOICES: To the Jacobin Club! Long live Robespierre!

All leave.

SIMON: Poor me! Abandoned! (***He tries to sit up.***)

WIFE: There now. (***She supports him.***)

SIMON: Oh my Baucis, you heap coals of fire upon my head.

WIFE: There now, stand up.

SIMON: You're turning away? Ha, can you forgive me, Porcia? Did I strike you? That wasn't my hand, it wasn't my arm, my madness did it.

"His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it."

Where's our daughter, where's my Susie?

WIFE: Just round the corner.

SIMON: Let's go and find her! Come, my virtuous spouse.

Both off.

SCENE 2: A Room in Danton's House

HERAULT-SECHELLES and TWO LADIES at the card table. DANTON and JULIE a bit further off, Danton on a stool at Julie's feet.

DANTON: Look at the lovely lady, how nicely she plays her cards! Oh yes, she knows how to do it! They say she always offers her heart to her husband and the rest of her tricks to other men. — You women!

JULIE: Do you trust me?

DANTON: How should I know! We know so little of each other. We're thick-skinned creatures, we reach out for one another, but it's just a waste of effort, all we do is rub away at each other's coarse hides. We're very lonely.

JULIE: You know me, Danton.

DANTON: If you say so! You're my wife. You've got dark eyes, curly hair and you're always saying 'Dear Georges' to me. But (***points at her eyes and forehead***) there, there, what's behind there. Our senses are crude. Know one another? We'd have to break open each other's skulls and tear the thoughts out from the fibres of the brain.

LADY: Hérault, what *are* you up to with your fingers?

CAMILLE: Nothing!

LADY: Don't bend your thumb like that, it's quite obscene!

CAMILLE: But you see, the thing's got a life of its own.

DANTON: No, Julie, I love you like the grave.

JULIE: (***turning away***) Oh!

DANTON: No, listen! They say there's peace in the grave, peace and the grave are one. If that's true, then, when I lie in your lap, I'm under the earth already. You

sweet grave, your lips are my death knell, your voice is the funeral bell, your breast is my burial mound, and your heart my coffin.

LADY: Lost!

HERAULT: *That* was an amorous adventure, and it costs money like all the rest. I wouldn't let my daughter play that sort of game, the kings and queens fall on each other so indecently.

CAMILLE and LACROIX enter.

HERAULT: What a gloomy look, Lacroix! Have you torn a hole in your red cap? Did the Incorruptible scowl at you? Did it rain at the guillotining, or did you get such a bad place that you couldn't see properly.

LACROIX: Another twenty victims have fallen today.

CAMILLE: We were wrong about the Hébertists: they were sent to the scaffold not because they were extremists, but because they were anarchists — they didn't go about it systematically enough.

HERAULT: Or perhaps, Camille, because the Committee of Public Safety can't afford to let the People fear someone else more than them.

LACROIX: Marat reckoned five hundred heads would save half a million citizens. The Incorruptible wouldn't shrink from adding a few noughts to that calculation. How long must we remain covered in dirt and blood like newborn babes, with coffins for cradles and human heads for playthings. We must progress: the Committee of Clemency must be set up, the expelled Deputies must be reinstated.

HERAULT: The Revolution has reached the stage where it must be reorganized.

The Revolution must cease and the Republic begin. In our constitution, duty must give way to right, virtue to comfort, and punishment to reasonable self-defence. Each man must be able to express his own nature. Whether he's sensible or stupid, educated or uneducated, good or evil, that's no concern of the state. We're all fools, and none of us has the right to force his own particular brand of folly on someone else.

CAMILLE: The constitution must be a transparent garment, which clings to the body of the People. Each pulse of the veins, each contraction of the muscles, each

twitch of the sinews must make its mark. Whether the body is beautiful or ugly, it has the right to be itself. We've no right to fit it with a coat cut to our own taste. The people who want throw a nun's habit over the naked shoulders of our dear sinner France must be rapped on the knuckles. We want naked gods, bacchanalian women, and melodious lips crying, "Oh, wicked, limb-releasing love."

Let the Romans go on sitting in a corner cooking turnips, so long as they spare us any more gladiatorial games.

Venus of the Beautiful Behind must replace our patron saint Marat as the gatekeeper of the Republic.

Danton, you will launch the attack at the next meeting of the Convention.

DANTON: I will, you will, he will. If we live to see it! as the old women say. At the end of an hour, sixty minutes will have passed, won't they, my boy?

CAMILLE: What are you on about? That's obvious.

DANTON: Oh, it's all obvious. Who's going to set all these fine things in motion?

LACROIX: We and the decent folk.

DANTON: That 'and' in the middle is a long word, it keeps us a bit too far apart. It's a long road and the decent folk will be out of breath before they meet up with us. Supposing we do meet up! The decent folk — you can lend money to them, you can be godfather to their children and marry your daughters to them, but that's all!

CAMILLE: If that's your view, why did you start the struggle?

DANTON: Those people made me sick. I couldn't look at such puritanical, self-important stoics without giving them a kick. It's just my nature. (***He gets up.***)

JULIE: Are you going?

DANTON: (***to Julie***) I've got to go, they just drive me mad with their politics. (***As he goes out***) In passing, a prophecy: the statue of freedom has not yet been cast, but the furnace is fired and we could all still get our fingers burnt. (***Exit.***)

CAMILLE: Let him go! Do you think he'll be able to keep his fingers out of it when it comes to action?

HERAULT: True, but it would just be to pass the time, like playing chess.

SCENE 3: The Jacobin Club

ARTIST: A Frenchwoman, an artist without a position: that's what I am. However, what might be the object of my despair instead fills my soul with purest joy. Unable to make pecuniary sacrifices to aid my Fatherland, which you have declared to be in danger, I come to pay it homage with my person. Born with the courage of a Roman and with the hatred of tyrants, I would consider myself fortunate to contribute to their destruction. May the last despot perish! Intriguers, vile slaves of Nero and Caligula, may I be able to annihilate you all! And you, mothers of families, whom I would blame for abandoning your children to follow my example, while I do my duty combating the enemies of the Fatherland, you do yours instilling in your children the sentiments that all Frenchmen should have at birth — the love of liberty and the horror of despots. Never forget that without the virtues of Vesturia, Rome would have been deprived of the great Coriolanus. You have proclaimed the Fatherland in danger, but that is not enough; dismiss from office those who alone have created the danger and sworn the destruction of France. Speak a word, a single word, and the enemies will disappear.

ROBESP: Citizen, made more for softening tyrants than for struggle against them, you offer to bear arms for liberty. We applaud your patriotism and accord you the honour of this session.

LAUNDRESS: Messiah, the laundresses of Paris have come into this sacred sanctuary of law and justice to set forth their concerns.

LAUNDRESS: Not only are all essential foodstuffs being sold at excessive prices, but also the price of the raw materials used in bleaching have gotten so high that soon the least fortunate class of people will be unable to have white underwear, which it cannot do without. It is not that the materials are lacking — they're abundant — it is hoarding and speculation which drive up the price. You have brought the head of the Tyrant beneath the blade of the Law, let the blade of the Law bear down on the heads of these public bloodsuckers. We demand the death penalty for hoarders and speculators.

ROBESP: Citizen, we will occupy ourselves with the object of your concern and invite you to remain for the duration of this session.

MAN FROM LYONS: Our brothers in Lyons have sent me to pour out to you their bitter indignation at the execution of Ronsin, the saviour of our city. It is not for us to say whether the cart on which you sent him and the other Hébertists to the guillotine was the hearse of freedom, but we do know that since then the Royalists of Lyons, the murderers of the martyr Chalier, are once again walking around confident that *they* will not end up in the grave. Have you forgotten that Lyons is a stain upon the soil of France that must be covered with the bones of traitors? Your mercy is murdering the Revolution. Every breath an aristocrat draws is the death rattle of freedom. Only a coward dies for the Republic, a Jacobin kills for it. Know this: if we no longer find in you the vigour of the men who stormed the Tuileries on the 10th of August, killed the Royalists in September, and expelled the Girondins from the Convention on the 31st of May, then, like Gaillard the patriot, we will have no choice but the dagger of Cato.

Applause and confused shouting.

A JACOBIN: We will join with you in drinking the cup of Socrates!

LEGENDRE: (***leaps up onto the podium***) We have no need to look as far as Lyons. The people who wear clothes of silk, travel in coaches, sit in boxes at the theatre and speak according to the Dictionary of the Academy, are here in Paris. They have been going around for some days with their heads firmly on their necks. They joke and say that our heroes Marat and Chalier deserve a double martyrdom and should be guillotined in effigy.

Uproar in the assembly.

ST. JUST: They are dead men: they are guillotined by their own tongues.

LEGENDRE: May the blood of these saints fall upon them! I ask the members of the Committee of Public Safety here present, how is it that they have turned a blind eye...

BILLAUD: (***interrupting***) And I ask you, Legendre, whose voice is it that breathes life into such ideas, so that they quicken and dare to speak? It's time to tear off the masks. Listen! The cause is accusing its effect, the cry its echo, the reason its consequence. The Committee of Public Safety is well aware of who is behind all this, Legendre. Don't worry! The busts of the saints will remain inviolate, medusa-like they will turn the traitors to stone.

ROBESP: I demand the floor.

THE JACOBINS: Silence, silence for the Incorruptible.

ROBESP: We were only waiting for the cry of indignation on all sides to speak. Our eyes were open, we saw the enemy arm himself and rise up, but we did not sound the alarm. We allowed the People to keep its own watch, it has not slept, it has taken up arms and rattled its sabre. We allowed the enemy to break cover, we let him advance; now he stands clear, in the open, in the bright light of day. Every stroke will hit home, he is dead the moment you catch sight of him.

I have told you before: the internal enemies of the Republic have disintegrated into two factions, as if into two armies. Under banners of differing colour and on the most different of paths, both are rushing towards the same objective. One of these factions, the Hébertists, is no more. In its affected insanity it declared war on God and on property, to create a diversion which would favour the foreign kings. The triumph of Hébert would have thrown the Republic into a state of chaos. The sword of the law has struck down the traitor. But why should that worry our enemies abroad, as long as there are still criminals of another colour who can be used for the same ends? We have achieved nothing if we still have another faction to destroy.

This faction is the opposite of the other. It urges us towards weakness, its battle-cry is: Mercy! It wants to tear from the hands of the People both their weapons and the power which wields those weapons, in order to deliver the People, naked and emasculated, to the kings.

The weapon of the Republic is Terror, the power of the Republic is Virtue: Virtue, because without it Terror is destructive; Terror, because without it Virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing but an emanation of Virtue, it is nothing but swift, rigorous and unbending justice. *They* say, Terror is the weapon of a despotic government, and our government thus resembles despotism. True enough! The revolutionary government is the despotism of freedom against tyranny.

“Mercy for the Royalists!” is the cry in certain quarters. Mercy for the villains? No!

In a republic, only republicans are citizens, Royalists and Foreigners are enemies. To punish the subjugators of humanity is an act of grace; to forgive them is an act of barbarism.

And not satisfied with tearing the weapons from the hands of the People, they attempt to poison the most sacred sources of its power with Vice. Vice is the most subtle, most dangerous and most repugnant attack on freedom. In a republic, Vice is not just a moral, but also a political crime; the man of vice is the political enemy of freedom, and he is all the more of a danger to it, the greater the services he seems to have done it.

You will readily understand me, if you think of people who used to live in garrets and now go about in carriages and fornicate with former marchionesses and baronesses. We may well ask: are the People not entitled to feel robbed when we legislators of the People display all the vices and all the luxury of the former courtiers, when we see these marquesses and counts of the Revolution marry rich women, give luxurious banquets, play cards, keep servants and wear expensive clothes? We may well be astonished when we hear them showing off their wit and culture, and putting on fine manners. I think no more strokes are needed, the portraits are finished.

Do not worry, virtuous People, do not worry, you patriots! Tell your brothers in Lyons: the sword of the law will not rust in the hands to which you have entrusted it! — We will set the Republic a great example!

General applause.

MANY VOICES: Long live the Republic! Long live Robespierre!

CHAIRMAN: The session is adjourned.

All leave. LACROIX and LEGENDRE remain behind.

LACROIX: What have you done, Legendre! Do you know whose head you're toppling with your talk of the busts of Saints Marat and Chalier?

LEGENDRE: A few dandies and smart women, that's all.

LACROIX: You're committing suicide, you're a shadow that kills its original and in doing so kills itself.

LEGENDRE: I don't understand.

LACROIX: I would have thought Robespierre had spoken clearly. Who do you think the Incorruptible was referring to when he talked of the marquesses and counts of the Revolution?

LEGENDRE: Well?

LACROIX: It's simple: The extremists have been sent to the scaffold; but that's no help to the People, they're still running around the streets barefoot wanting to make shoes from the hides of aristocrats. The thermometer of the guillotine cannot be allowed to fall; a few degrees lower and the Committee of Public Safety can expect to be put to bed in the Place de la Révolution.

LEGENDRE: And what have my busts got to do with that?

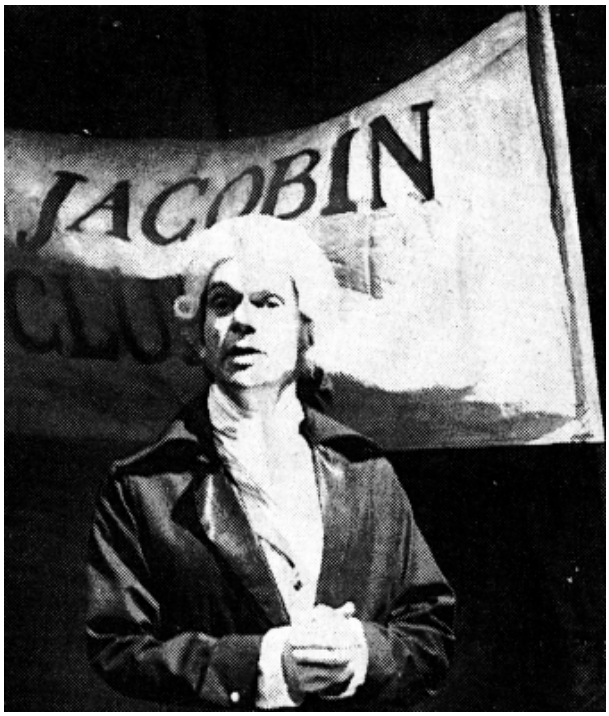
LACROIX: Can you still not see it? You have, officially, identified the counter-revolution, you have forced the Committee to act, you've guided their hand. The People is a minotaur which must have its corpses every week, if it's not to turn on its keepers.

LEGENDRE: Where's Danton?

LACROIX: How should I know? He's been trying to piece together the Venus de Medici from all the whores of the Palais-Royal; he's making a mosaic, as he puts it. Heaven knows what part of the body he's on at the moment.

Let's go to the Palais-Royal.

Both off.



Robespierre (Des McAleer) addressing the Jacobin Club.

SCENE 4: A Room in the Palais-Royal

DANTON, MARION.

MARION: No, leave me alone! Like this, on my bed. I want to tell you something.

DANTON: There's a better use for your lips.

MARION: No, just leave me alone for once. — My mother was a clever woman. She always told me chastity was a fine virtue. When people came into the house and started talking about certain things, she would order me out of the room; if I asked what the people had wanted, she'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself; if she gave me a book to read, then there were always pages I had to skip. But the Bible I could read to my heart's content, everything in it was holy; but there was something in it I didn't understand. I didn't want to ask anybody, I brooded on my own. Then spring came. All around me there was something going on that I had no part in. A peculiar mood came over me, it almost stifled me. I looked at my body, sometimes it seemed as if there were two of me, then I melted back into one. A young man used to come to the house at that time; he was good-looking and often said strange things. I didn't really know what he wanted but I couldn't help laughing. My mother asked him to come often, and that suited both of us. In the end we couldn't see why we shouldn't lie between two sheets with one another rather than sit on two chairs next to one another. It gave me more pleasure than his conversation and I couldn't see why I should be allowed the lesser and denied the greater. We did it in secret. And that's how it went on. But I became an ocean that swallowed everything up and went deeper and deeper. For me there was no distinction between one man and another, all men melted into a single body. That was just my nature, who can help that? In the end he noticed. One morning he came and kissed me as if he wanted to suffocate me; his arms tightened around my neck, I was in terrible fear. Then he let go of me and laughed and said he'd almost done something stupid. I should just keep my dress and make the most of it, it would wear out on its own, he didn't want to spoil my fun before time, it was the only thing I had. Then he went. Again I didn't know what he wanted. That evening I sat at the window; I'm very sensitive and feelings are my only contact with the things around me; I lost myself in the waves of the sunset. Then a crowd of people came down the street, the children ran ahead, the women looked out of the windows. I looked

down, they were carrying him past in a basket. The moon shone on his pale forehead, his curly hair was wet, he'd drowned himself. I couldn't help crying. — That was the only time I felt at odds with myself. Others have Sundays and weekdays, they work for six days and pray on the seventh, once a year, on their birthday, they get sentimental and once a year, at New Year, they reflect on things. I don't understand any of that, for me there aren't any breaks, any changes. I'm all of a piece, an endless longing and holding, a fire, a torrent. My mother died of grief; people point their fingers at me. That's stupid. In the end it makes no difference what you find your pleasure in, bodies, crucifixes, flowers or children's toys; it's the same feeling. The person who enjoys most deeply, prays most deeply.

DANTON: Why can I not quite hold your beauty within me, not quite embrace it?

MARION: Danton, your lips have eyes.

DANTON: I wish I could be part of the æther, then I could bathe you in my current, I could break myself on every wave of your beautiful body.

LACROIX, ADELAIDE, ROSALIE enter.

LACROIX: (***stays in the doorway***) I can't help laughing, I can't help laughing.

DANTON: (***reluctantly***) Well?

LACROIX: I was just thinking about what happened in the street.

DANTON: And?

LACROIX: There were two dogs in the street, a Great Dane and a Maltese lap-dog, and it was rather painful to watch.

DANTON: What of it?

LACROIX: It just occurred to me and I couldn't help laughing. It looked very edifying.

Legendre and I have been through most of the cells. The Little Nuns of the Revelation through the Flesh hung on our coat-tails and wanted a blessing. Legendre's going through the ritual with one of them now, but he'll have to abstain for a month for it. Here I bring you two Sisters of Mercy, each serving in a hospital — her own body.

MARION: Good evening, Miss Adelaide! Good evening, Miss Rosalie.

ROSALIE: It's some time since we had the pleasure.

MARION: I was sorry not to see you.

ADELAIDE: Oh God, we're occupied day and night.

DANTON: ***to Rosalie***) My, my, little one, you've grown a lovely pair of hips.

ROSALIE: Well, of course, one perfects oneself daily.

DANTON: And Adelaide has acquired an interesting modesty, a piquant variation. Her face looks like a fig-leaf she's holding in front of her whole body. Such a fig-tree on such a well-used road gives a refreshing shade.

ADELAIDE: I'd be a cattle-track, if sir...

DANTON: I understand; but don't be cross, miss.

And Miss Rosalie is a compass needle: men are attracted either by the top half or by the bottom half, but not both, and in the middle there's an equator where everyone who crosses the line needs a bath of mercury to cure the pox.

ROSALIE: You should be ashamed, to make us blush like that!

ADELAIDE: You ought to have more manners!

ADELAIDE and ROSALIE off.

DANTON: Good night, sweet children!

LACROIX: Good night, you pits of mercury!

DANTON: I feel sorry for them, they've lost their evening meal.

LACROIX: Listen, Danton, I've just come from the Jacobin Club.

DANTON: Is that all?

LACROIX: The deputation from Lyons read out a proclamation; they seemed to think they had no option but the dagger of Cato. Each made a face as if to say, "It

doesn't hurt." Legendre shouted that people were trying to smash the busts of Chalier and Marat. I think he's gone out of his mind.

DANTON: And Robespierre?

LACROIX: Rapped his fingers on the podium and said: Virtue must reign through Terror. The phrase gave me a pain in the neck.

And Billaud screamed like a madman that the masks must be torn off.

DANTON: And the faces will follow.

HERAULT enters.

LACROIX: What news, Hérault?

HERAULT: After I left the Jacobin Club, I went to Robespierre, I demanded an explanation. He tried to put on a face like Brutus sacrificing his sons.

He spoke in general terms of duties, and said where freedom was concerned he was reckless, he would sacrifice everything, himself, his brother, his friends.

DANTON: He couldn't have put it more clearly, but you only need to reverse the order and that leaves him standing at the foot of the scaffold holding the ladder for his friends. We must be grateful to Legendre, he made them speak out.

LACROIX: The extremists are not all dead yet, and the People are in a wretched state, that's a terrible lever. The pan of blood on the scales of the Revolution must not become too light or it will endanger the Committee of Public Safety. The Committee needs ballast, it needs a solid head.

DANTON: I know — the Revolution is like Saturn, it eats its own children. (***After some consideration***) Still, they won't dare.

LACROIX: Danton, you're a dead saint, but the Revolution has no place for holy relics, it threw the bones of all the French kings into the street and all the statues out of the churches. Do you think you'd be allowed to stand as a monument?

DANTON: What about my name!

LACROIX: Your name! You're a moderate, I'm one, so's Camille, Hérault. For the People weakness and moderation are the same thing, they kill anyone who can't keep up.

DANTON: Too true, and what is more — the People is like a child, it has to break everything to see what's inside.

LACROIX: And what is more, Danton, we *are* men of vice, as Robespierre says, i.e. we enjoy life; and the People are virtuous, i.e. they do not enjoy life, because work dulls their organs of enjoyment, they don't get drunk because they haven't got any money, and they don't go to the brothel, because their breath stinks of cheese and herrings, which the girls find disgusting.

DANTON: They hate the Epicureans the way a eunuch hates men.

LACROIX: They call us rogues and, (***speaking into Danton's ear***) between you and me, there's a grain of truth in it.

DANTON: They never had courage without me, they won't have any against me. The Revolution isn't finished yet, they might still need me, they'll keep me in the arsenal.

LACROIX: We must act.

DANTON: Time will tell.

LACROIX: Time will tell once we are lost.

MARION: (***to Danton***) Your lips have grown cold, your words have stifled your kisses.

DANTON: (***to Marion***) So much time wasted? It was worth it!

(***To Lacroix***) Tomorrow I'll go to Robespierre; I'll provoke him, he won't be able to keep quiet then. Tomorrow, then! Good night, my friends, good night! I thank you!

LACROIX: Be off, my dear friends, be off! Good night, Danton! The thighs of the young lady will guillotine you, her mound of Venus will be the cliff they throw you from.

Off.

Danton (Steven Dykes) with Marion (Danielle Allan).

SCENE 5: A Room in Robespierre's House

ROBESPIERRE, DANTON, a companion.

ROBESP: I tell you, the man who stays my arm when I draw my sword is my enemy, no matter what his intentions. The man who prevents me from defending myself kills me as surely as if he himself were to attack me.

DANTON: Where self-defence ends, murder begins. I can see no reason that forces us to keep on killing.

ROBESP: The social revolution is not yet complete; the man who leaves a revolution only half finished digs his own grave. The ruling class is not yet dead, the wholesome power of the People must put itself in place of this class worn out by excesses of indulgence. Vice must be punished, Virtue must rule by terror.

DANTON: I don't know what you mean by "Vice".

You and your Virtue, Robespierre! You've never taken bribes, you've never run up debts, you've never slept with a woman, you've always dressed respectably and never got drunk. Robespierre, you are infuriatingly upright. I'd be ashamed to walk around for thirty years between heaven and earth with a moral complexion like that, just for the sordid pleasure of looking down on others.

Isn't there anything inside you which occasionally whispers quietly, secretly, "You're a fraud, you're a fraud!"

ROBESP: My conscience is clear.

DANTON: Conscience is the mirror an ape squirms in front of. Everyone dolls himself up the best he can and goes in search of a good time in his own way. And everyone is permitted to defend himself when someone else spoils his fun. Have you got the right to turn the guillotine into a washtub for other people's dirty linen, and to use their guillotined heads as scrubbing-brushes for their dirty clothes, just because your own coat is always so neatly brushed? Of course, you can defend yourself when people spit on it or tear holes in it, but what concern is it of yours, as long as they leave you alone. If they don't mind going around like that, does that give you the right to lock them up in the grave? Are you heaven's constable? And if you can't bear the

sight of it as well as that Supreme Being of yours, then hold a hanky in front of your eyes.

ROBESP: You deny Virtue?

DANTON: And Vice. We are all Epicureans, some coarse and some discriminating, Christ was the most discriminating; that's the only difference I can find between men. Everyone acts according to his nature, i.e. he does what does him good.

Eh, Incorruptible, it's cruel of me to kick the heels out from under your shoes like this, isn't it?

ROBESP: Danton, there are times when Vice is high treason.

DANTON: You can't proscribe it, for heaven's sake, that would be ungrateful — you depend on it too much — for contrast, I mean.

By the way, to put it in your terms, our "strokes" must be of use to the Republic, one can't strike at the innocent as well as the guilty.

ROBESP: And what makes you think an innocent man has suffered?

DANTON: (***to companion***) Did you hear that? No innocent man has died! (***Goes, saying to companion:***) We haven't got a moment to lose, we must show ourselves.

ROBESP: Go, then! He wants to stop the steeds of the Revolution when they reach the brothel, like a coachman with his obedient nags. But they'll have the strength to drag him on to the Place de la Révolution.

Kick the heels out from under my shoes! To put it in your terms! Stop, stop! Is that what it is? They'll say his form cast too great a shadow over me and so I told him to step out of the sun.

And what if they were right?

Is it really so necessary? Yes, yes, the Republic! He must go.

It's ridiculous, the way my thoughts spy on each other. He must go. The man who stands still in a surging crowd offers as much resistance as if he were going against it: he will be trodden underfoot.

Away with a society that has taken the clothes from the dead aristocracy and inherited its leprosy.

No Virtue! Virtue the heel of my shoe. In my terms!

How that keeps coming back.

Why can't I get rid of the idea? It keeps pointing its bloody finger there, there! No matter how many bandages I wrap around it, the blood always seeps through. (***After a pause***) I can't tell which part of me is lying to which.

(***He goes to the window.***) Night snores over the earth and thrashes in a desolate dream. Thoughts, desires, barely suspected, chaotic and formless, which shyly hid from the light of day, are now taking on form and substance, and sneaking into the silent house of dreams. They open the doors, they look out of the windows, they half become flesh, they stretch their limbs in sleep, their lips murmur. — And isn't our waking life just a more lucid dream? Are we not sleepwalkers? Are not our actions like those of a dream, only clearer, more definite, more complete? Who can blame us for that? In one hour the mind achieves more in thought than our slothful organism can match in years. Sin lies in thought. Whether the thought is turned into deed, whether the body imitates the mind, that is chance.

ST. JUST appears.

Hey, who's that in the dark! Hey, light, light!

ST. JUST: Do you know my voice?

ROBESP: Oh it's you, St. Just! (***A maidservant brings light.***)

ST. JUST: Were you alone?

ROBESP: Danton has just left.

ST. JUST: On my way here I bumped into him in the Palais-Royal. He'd put on his revolutionary face and was speaking in epigrams; he was very matey with the sans-culottes, the whores drooled over his legs, and people stood there whispering to each other what he had said. We shall lose the advantage of attack. Are you going to hesitate any longer? We shall act without you. We've made up our minds.

ROBESP: What do you intend to do?

ST. JUST: We will call a solemn session of the Legislative Committee, the Committee of General Security and the Committee of Public Safety.

ROBESP: There's much to discuss.

ST. JUST: We must bury the great body with respect, like priests, not like murderers; we mustn't mutilate it, all its parts must be buried.

ROBESP: Be more explicit.

ST. JUST: We must bury it in full armour, and slay its horses and slaves on the burial mound: Lacroix...

ROBESP: An out and out rogue. Go on!

ST. JUST: Hérault-Séchelles.

ROBESP: A fine head!

ST. JUST: He was the decorative initial on the bill of the constitution. We've no further need for such ornament. He will be wiped out. Camille.

ROBESP: Him too?

ST. JUST: (***Gives him a document***) That's what I thought. Read this!

ROBESP: Aha, "Le Vieux Cordelier", is that all? He's a child, he's just been having a laugh at you.

ST. JUST: Read this! *This*! (***Indicates a passage to him.***)

ROBESP: (***Reads***) "This bloody messiah Robespierre on his Calvary between the two thieves Couthon and Collot, where he sacrifices others but is not sacrificed himself. The Sisters of the Guillotine stand below like the Virgin and Mary Magdalen. St. Just is close to his heart like St. John and acquaints the Convention with the apocalyptic revelations of his master.

"Are we supposed to believe that the clean coat of the Messiah is the winding-sheet of France, and those thin fingers of his which twitch when he's on the podium are the blades of the guillotine?"

You too, then, Camille!

Get rid of them! Quickly! Only the dead do not return. Have you got the indictment ready?

ST. JUST: It won't be a problem. You've already dropped hints at the Jacobin Club.

ROBESP: I wanted to give them a shock.

ST. JUST: I only need to put the wheels in motion.

ROBESP: Quickly then, tomorrow! No long drawn-out fight to the death! I've been feeling sensitive about it for some days. Just do it quickly!

ST. JUST off.

ROBESP: Yes indeed, "bloody Messiah, who sacrifices others but is not sacrificed himself". — Christ saved them with his blood, and I shall save them with their own. He made them sin, and I will take their sin upon me. He had the ecstasy of pain, and I shall have the torture of the executioner.

Which of us has denied himself more, he or I? —

Why do we only consider the individual? Verily, the son of man is crucified in us all, we are all suffering the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating blood, but we do not redeem one another with our wounds. — My Camille! — They are all going from me — everything is empty and desolate — I am alone.

ACT 2

SCENE 1: A Room in Danton's House

DANTON, LACROIX, HERAULT, CAMILLE.

CAMILLE: Quick, Danton, we've no time to lose!

DANTON: (***dressing***) It's very tedious, always putting your shirt on first and then pulling your trousers on over it, and crawling into bed in the evening and out of it again in the morning, and always putting one foot in front of the other. There's no seeing how it could ever change. It's very sad, and that millions have done it that way already and millions will do it that way again, not to mention the fact that we've got two halves, which both do the same, so that everything happens in duplicate. It's very sad.

CAMILLE: You're talking like a child.

DANTON: The dying often grow childish.

LACROIX: You're heading for disaster with your delay, you're pulling all your friends down with you. Tell the cowards in the Convention, those on both sides, that it's time for them to rally round you. Cry out against the tyranny of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety. Talk of daggers, invoke Brutus, then you'll rouse the tribunes. Give yourself over to your anger. Let's at least not die disarmed and humiliated like the shameful Hébert.

DANTON: You've got a bad memory. You called me a dead saint. You were more right than you thought. I went to see the leaders of the Commune, they were respectful, like mortuary attendants. I'm a holy relic, and relics get thrown out into the street, you were right.

LACROIX: Why did you let it come to that?

DANTON: Come to that? Yes, I suppose I did, in the end I got bored with it. Always running around in the same coat and pulling the same face!

Anyway, what support have we got? The Jacobins have declared that Virtue is the order of the day, the city Commune is doing penance for supporting Hébert, the Convention — that might still be a way! But Robespierre is the dogma of the Revolution, the Convention won't just let us cancel it. It wouldn't work either. We didn't make the Revolution, the Revolution made us.

And if it did work — I'd rather be guillotined myself than have others guillotined. I've had enough, why should we human beings fight against one another? We should sit down beside one another and be at peace. Something went wrong when we were created, something's missing in us, I can't find a name for it — but we'll never dig it out of each other's entrails, so why should we break open each other's bodies over it?

CAMILLE: To put it more tragically, you mean: how long is humanity to go on eating its own limbs in its eternal hunger? Or: how long are we castaways, marooned on a wreck, to go on sucking out each other's blood in our unquenchable thirst?

DANTON: You're a strong echo.

CAMILLE: You should have me at your side all the time.

LACROIX: And France is left to its executioners?

DANTON: Why not? The people don't mind that. They're miserable and their misery gives them a chance to be sentimental, noble, virtuous or witty, or simply stops them getting bored.

What does it matter whether they die from the guillotine or fever or old age? It's even preferable for them to leave the stage with sprightly limbs, to go off with a few nice gestures and hear the audience clapping. That's quite civilised, and it's appropriate: we're always in the theatre, even if we end up being stabbed for real.

It's good for one's lifespan to be cut down a bit. Life becomes an epigram — that's fine. And who's got the breath and the spirit for an epic in fifty or sixty cantos?

And finally — I'd have to speak out; that's just too much trouble, life is not worth the effort one makes to hold on to it.

CAMILLE: Escape then, Danton!

DANTON: Can you take your country with you on the soles of your shoes? And finally — and this is the main thing: they won't dare. (***To Camille***) Come, my boy, I tell you, they won't dare. Goodbye, goodbye.

DANTON and CAMILLE off.

LACROIX: There he goes.

HERAULT: Not believing a word he said. Sheer laziness. He'd rather be guillotined than make a speech.

LACROIX: What's to be done?

HERAULT: Go home and, like Lucretia, rehearse for a respectable death.

SCENE 2: Promenade

People out walking, woman with pram.

CITIZEN 1: My dear Jacqueline, I mean Agrip..., I mean Ag...

SIMON: Agrippina, Citizen, Agrippina.

CITIZEN 1: My dear Agrippina has blessed me with a baby boy.

SIMON: Has borne a son to the Republic.

CITIZEN 1: To the Republic, that sounds too general — people might think...

SIMON: But that's just the point: the individual must yield to the general...

CITIZEN 1: Of course, that's what my wife says too.

STREETSINGER: (***sings***)

"Nought but worry, nought but sorrow.
All today and all tomorrow."

CITIZEN 1: Oh, the name, I can't make up my mind about that.

SIMON: Call him Pike, or Marat!

STREETSINGER: (***sings***)

"Nought but worry, nought but sorrow.
All today and all tomorrow."

CITIZEN 1: I'd like to have three — there's something about the number three — including something practical and something honest. Now I've got it: Plough, Robespierre.

And what about the third one?

SIMON: Pike.

CITIZEN 1: Thank you. Pike, Plough, Robespierre, those are lovely names, that's wonderful.

SIMON: I tell you, the breast of your Agrippina will be like the udders of the Roman she-wolf — no, that doesn't work, Romulus was a tyrant, that doesn't work. (***They pass by.***)

BEGGAR: (***sings***):

"A handful of earth
And a little bit of moss..."

Dear sirs, lovely ladies!

1ST GENT: Find work, my man, you look quite well fed.

2ND GENT: There! (***Gives him money***) His hand's like velvet. It's outrageous!

BEGGAR: Sir, how did you get your coat?

2ND GENT: By work, by work! You could have one like it, too, I'll give you a job, come to my house, I live...

BEGGAR: Sir, why did you work?

2ND GENT: To get the coat, you fool!

BEGGAR: You put yourself out for a luxury; because a coat like that is a luxury, a rag would serve just as well. Fancy being such a fool. The work and the luxury cancel out.

(***Sings***) "A handful of earth
And a little bit of moss..."

ROSALIE: (***to Adelaide***) Come on, there's some soldiers coming! We haven't had anything warm inside us since yesterday.

BEGGAR: (***sings***):

"Is on this earth
All that I have got."

Gentlemen, Ladies!

SOLDIER: Stop! Where are you off to, my little ones? (***To Rosalie***) How old are you?

ROSALIE: As old as my little finger.

SOLDIER: You're very sharp.

ROSALIE: And you're very flat.

SOLDIER: Well, I'll sharpen myself on you.

(***He sings***)

"Dear Christina, my dear Christina
Does it make you sore, you sore,
You sore, you sore."

ROSALIE: (***sings***)

"Oh, no, good soldier, sir
I'd like to have much more, much more,
Much more, much more."

DANTON and CAMILLE enter.

DANTON: Isn't it entertaining? I can feel something in the air, it's as if the sun is hatching out lechery.

Doesn't it make you want to jump in, tear your trousers off and cover them from behind like the dogs in the street?

They pass on.

YOUNG GENT: Oh madam, the sound of a bell, the evening light on the trees, the twinkling of a star...

LADY: The scent of a flower! These natural joys, this pure enjoyment of nature. (***To her daughter***) You see, Eugenie, only Virtue has eyes for such things.

EUGENIE: (***kisses her mother's hand***) Oh, mama, I can see only you.

LADY: Dear child!

Y. GENT: (***whispers to Eugenie***) Can you see the pretty lady over there with the old gentleman?

EUGENIE: I know her.

Y. GENT: They say her hairdresser has given her a bun.

EUGENIE: (***laughs***) Wicked gossip!

Y. GENT: The old gent walks by her side. He can see the bud swelling and brings it out into the sun, thinking he is the cloudburst that made it grow.

EUGENIE: How improper. It makes me want to blush.

Y. GENT: That could make me turn pale.

They go off.

DANTON: (***to Camille***) Don't expect anything serious of me. I don't understand why the people don't just stop in the street and laugh in each other's faces. I mean, they ought to be hanging out of the windows and out of the graves laughing, and heaven ought to be bursting and the earth ought to be rolling with laughter.

They go off.

1ST GENT: I can assure you, an extraordinary discovery! It gives all the technical arts a completely different complexion. Humanity is rushing with giant strides towards its noble destiny.

2ND GENT: Have you seen the new play? A real Babel! The thing's a tangle of vaults, stairways, passages and all so easily and boldly tossed into the air. It makes you feel dizzy at every turn. A bizarre piece.

He stops, in difficulties.

1ST GENT: What's the matter, then?

2ND GENT: Oh, nothing. Your hand, sir! It's the puddle — right. Thank you. That was a close thing, it could have been dangerous!

1ST GENT: But surely you weren't afraid?

2ND GENT: Yes, the earth is just a thin crust. I always think I might fall through where there's a hole like that.

One must tread carefully, it might crack under your weight. But go to the theatre, I recommend it to you.

SCENE 3: A Room in Camille's House

DANTON, CAMILLE, LUCILE

CAMILLE: I tell you, if people don't get everything in lifeless copies, neatly labelled in theatres, concerts and exhibitions, then they've no eyes or ears for it. Takes some trivial sentiment, some aphorism, some notion and dress it up in coat and trousers, give it hands and feet, paint its face and make the thing torture itself through three acts, until it ends up getting married or shooting itself — perfection! Oh, the art!

Turn the people out of the theatre into the street: sordid reality! — They turn their backs on the good Lord, preferring a bad copyist. Of creation, which every moment replenishes itself, glowing, surging and sparkling about them and within them, they hear and see nothing. They go to the theatre, read poems and novels, imitate the puppets in them and say to God's creatures: how common you are!

DANTON: And the artists treat nature like David: in September, when the victims of the massacres were being thrown out of the prison into the street, he stood there cold-bloodedly sketching them, saying, "I'm catching the last twitches of life in these wretches."

DANTON is called out.

CAMILLE: What do you say, Lucile?

LUCILE: Nothing, I just like watching you talk.

CAMILLE: And do you hear what I say?

LUCILE: Oh, certainly!

CAMILLE: And am I right? Do you actually know what I said?

LUCILE: No, not really.

DANTON returns.

DANTON: The Committee of Public Safety has decided to arrest me. I've been warned and offered a place of refuge.

They want my head, well, let them take it. I've had enough of their bungling. What does it matter? I'll know how to die with courage, it'll be easier than living.

CAMILLE: Danton, there's still time!

DANTON: Impossible — but I'd never have thought...

CAMILLE: You and your laziness!

DANTON: I'm not lazy, just tired; I'm eager to be on my way.

CAMILLE: Where are you going?

DANTON: Well, if only we knew!

CAMILLE: Seriously, where?

DANTON: For a walk, my boy, for a walk.

He goes.

LUCILE: Oh, Camille!

CAMILLE: Don't worry, dear child!

LUCILE: When I think that this head will be...! My Camille! This is nonsense, isn't it, I'm mad?

CAMILLE: Don't worry, I'm not Danton.

LUCILE: The earth is vast and there are lots of things on it — why *that* in particular? Who has the right to take it from me? That would be wicked. What would they want with it anyway?

CAMILLE: I tell you again: you've no need to worry. I spoke to Robespierre yesterday: he was friendly. There's some tension between us, it's true, differing views, that's all!

LUCILE: Go and see him!

CAMILLE: We sat on the same bench at school. He was always gloomy and lonely. I was the only one to seek out his company and sometimes I made him laugh. He's always shown great affection for me. I'll go.

LUCILE: So soon, my friend? Come here! Just that (***she kisses him***) and that! Go, Go!

CAMILLE off.

LUCILE: This is a wicked time. That's the way it is. You must keep a hold on yourself.

(***Sings***)

"Oh, parting, oh, parting, oh, parting,
Who could invent such a thing?"

Why should *that* song come into my head. It's not good that it finds its own way there.

As he went out, I felt as if he could never turn back and would always be going further and further away from me, further and further.

How empty this room is. The windows are open, as if a dead body had lain here. I can't stand it here.

She goes.

SCENE 4: Open Ground

DANTON: I don't want to go on. I don't want to disturb this stillness with the clatter of my footsteps and the panting of my breath.

He sits down. After a pause:

Someone told me about a disease that makes you lose your memory. Death is meant to have something of that about it. Then sometimes I find myself hoping that perhaps death's effect is even stronger and makes you lose *everything*. But if that were true!

Then I'd run like a Christian to save my enemy, my memory.

The place I'm going to is supposed to be safe, well perhaps for my memory, but not for me. For me there's more safety in the grave, at least it will make me *forget*. It will kill my memory. In that place, though, my memory will live and kill me. Me or it? The answer is simple.

He gets up and turns round.

I'm flirting with Death; it's quite nice to sort of ogle him from a distance with a lorgnon. Really, I can't help laughing about the whole business. There's a feeling of permanence in me which says: tomorrow will be just like today; and the next day and ever after it will all be just as it is now. It's so much empty noise, they're trying to frighten me; they won't dare.

Off.

SCENE 5: A Room in Danton's House

Night.

DANTON: (***at the window***) Is it never going to stop? Will the light never fade and the sound never die away? Will it never be still and dark, so we can no longer see and hear each other's horrid sins? — September! —

JULIE: (***calls from within***) Georges! Georges!

DANTON: What is it?

JULIE: (***enters***) What did you call out?

DANTON: Did I call out?

JULIE: You were talking about horrid sins, and then you groaned, "September!"

DANTON: Me, me? No, I didn't say anything. I was hardly even thinking it, they were just quiet, secret thoughts.

JULIE: You're trembling, Georges!

DANTON: And shouldn't I be trembling, when the walls speak like that? When my body is so shattered that my thoughts, restless and wandering, are spoken by lips of stone? That's strange.

JULIE: Georges, my Georges!

DANTON: Yes, Julie, that's very strange. I don't want to think any more, if it speaks out like that. There are thoughts, Julie, for which there should be no ears. It's not good that they cry out the moment they're born, like children. It's not good.

JULIE: Georges, do you recognize me?

DANTON: Well, why not! You're a human being and then a woman and ultimately my wife, and the earth has five continents, Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia, and two and two make four. I'm all there, you see. — Wasn't there a cry of "September"? Didn't you say something like that?

JULIE: Yes, I could hear it at the other end of the house.

DANTON: As I came over to the window — (***he looks out***) the city is quiet, all the lights are out...

JULIE: There's a child crying nearby.

DANTON: As I came over to the window — a cry went through all the streets and wailed: "September!"

JULIE: You were dreaming, Georges. Get a hold on yourself.

DANTON: Dreaming? Yes, I was dreaming; but that was something different, I'll tell you in a second — my poor head is swimming — in a second! There, now I've got it! The earth's sphere panted under me as it spun, I'd grabbed it like a wild horse, with enormous limbs I grasped its mane and gripped its flanks, my head bent down, my hair fluttering over the abyss. And thus I was carried along. Then I cried out in fear and I woke up. I went over to the window — and that's when I heard it, Julie.

What does the word want with me. Why that one? What have I got to do with it? Why does it stretch out its bloody hands towards me. I didn't coin it.

Oh, help me, Julie, my mind is dull! Wasn't it in September, Julie?

JULIE: The kings and their armies were only forty hours from Paris...

DANTON: The fortifications had fallen, the aristocrats in the city...

JULIE: The Republic was lost.

DANTON: Yes, lost. We couldn't leave the enemy at our backs, we'd have been fools: two enemies on one plank, us or them, the stronger pushes off the weaker, that's fair, isn't it?

JULIE: Yes, yes.

DANTON: We slew them, that was no murder, that was civil war.

JULIE: You saved the country.

DANTON: Yes, I did. It was self-defence, we had to. The man on the cross made things easy for himself: "For it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

It must needs be, it was this ‘needs’, this necessity. Who would curse the hand on which the curse of necessity has fallen. Who uttered this necessity? What is it in us that lies, whores, steals and murders?

We’re puppets pulled on wires by unknown powers. Nothing, nothing in ourselves. Just the swords that spirits fight with, only you can’t see the hands, just like the fairy tale.

Now I’m calm.

JULIE: Quite calm, my love?

DANTON: Yes, Julie. Come, let’s go to bed.

SCENE 6: Street outside Danton's House

SIMON, MILITIAMEN, WOMEN.

SIMON: We must break in! Come on, citizens! We'll answer for it with our heads. Dead or alive! He's got powerful limbs. I'll go first, citizens.

Make way for freedom!

Look after my wife!

Forward, citizens, you will put your country in your debt!

CITIZEN: I wish our country would put itself in our debt; for all the holes we've made in other people's bodies, not a single one of the holes in our trousers has been sewn up.

CITIZEN: Do you want your flies sewn up? Ha ha ha!

CITIZENS: Ha ha ha!

SIMON: Forward, forward!

They break into Danton's house.

SCENE 7: The National Convention

A group of deputies.

LEGENDRE: First the Girondins, then the Hébertists, now Danton? Is the slaughter of deputies never going to stop? Who is safe if Danton falls?

DEPUTY: What's to be done?

LEGENDRE: He must be heard at the bar of the Convention. What can they put up against his voice?

DEPUTY: Impossible, there's a decree against it.

LEGENDRE: That must be rescinded or an exception permitted. I will make the application. I'm counting on your support.

ST. JUST: (***as CHAIRMAN***) The session is opened.

LEGENDRE: (***ascends the podium***) In the night just gone, four members of the Convention have been arrested. I know that Danton is one of them, I do not know the names of the rest. But whoever they may be, I demand that they be heard at the bar. Citizens, I declare this: I regard Danton as being as spotless as myself, and I do not believe that any reproach can be made to me. I do not wish to attack any member of the Public Safety or Security Committees, but sound reasons lead me to fear that personal animosity and personal passions might rob Liberty of men who have done her great service. The man who, with his energy, saved France in September 1792 deserves to be heard. He must be allowed to account for himself, if he is accused of high treason.

Commotion.

VOICES: We support Legendre's suggestion.

DEPUTY: The deputies are here in the name of the People, we cannot be removed without the will of our electors.

DEPUTY: Your words smell of corpses, you've taken them from the mouths of the Girondins.

DEPUTY: Do you want privileges?

DEPUTY: The axe of the law hangs over every head.

LEGENDRE: We cannot allow our committees to send our legislators from the sanctuary of the law to the guillotine.

DEPUTY: Crime has no sanctuary.

DEPUTY: Only crowned criminals find it on the throne.

DEPUTY: Only rogues invoke the right of sanctuary.

DEPUTY: Only murderers do not acknowledge it.

ROBESP: The confusion in this assembly is such as we have not seen for some time. It shows that great things are afoot. Today it will be decided whether a few men will carry off victory over our country. — How could you deny your principles so far as to grant today to a few individuals what you yesterday denied so many others? What is the meaning of this discrimination in favour of a few men? We do not enquire whether a man has done this or that patriotic deed, we enquire about his whole political career.

Legendre appears not to know the names of those arrested. The whole convention knows them. His friend Lacroix is among them. Why does Legendre appear not to know this? Because he well knows that there can be no honest defence of Lacroix. He named only Danton, because he believes that privilege is attached to this name. No, we want no privileges, we want no false gods. Applause.

What advantage does Danton have over Lafayette, over Dumouriez, over Brissot, Fabre, Chabot, Hébert? What has he done to earn this preferential treatment above his fellow-citizens? He and his followers protest against the despotism of the Committees, as if the trust which the People has placed in you and which you have in turn placed in the Committees were not a sufficient guarantee of their patriotism. They are trying to make you fear a misuse of power by those whom you yourselves have appointed. They pretend to be trembling in fear at this prospect. But I say to you, the man who trembles at this moment is guilty, for innocence never trembles in the face of public vigilance.

General applause.

They have tried to frighten me too. I was given to understand that the danger, as it approached Danton, could also reach me.

I received a letter informing me that I was being taken advantage of by friends of Danton who believed that the memory of an old attachment could make me moderate my zeal and my passion for freedom.

But I declare this: nothing will stand in my way, even if Danton's danger should become my own. We all stand in need of a little courage and greatness of soul. Only criminals and the mean-spirited are afraid of seeing their like fall at their side, because, when there is no longer a host of accomplices to hide them, they see themselves exposed to the light of truth. But if there are such souls in this assembly, then there are in it also heroic souls. The number of rogues is not great, we need only strike a few heads, and our country is saved.

Applause.

I demand that Legendre's suggestion be rejected.

The deputies all rise to signify unanimous agreement.

ST. JUST: There appear to be in this assembly a few sensitive ears unable to stand the word "blood". A few general observations may convince them that we are no more cruel than Nature and Time. Nature follows its laws calmly and irresistibly, man is destroyed where he comes into conflict with them. A change in the composition of the air, the flaring up of subterranean fire, a variation in the equilibrium of a body of water and a plague, a volcanic eruption, a flood bury thousands. What is the result? An insignificant change in physical nature, barely perceptible on the large scale, which would have passed almost without trace, if it were not for corpses in its wake. I ask you now: is moral nature in its revolutions meant to show more consideration than physical nature? Is an idea not allowed, just as much as a law of physics, to destroy what challenges it. Is an event which redefines the whole constitution of moral nature, that is to say humanity, not allowed to go through blood? The spirit of the world makes use of our arms in the spiritual domain, just as it makes use of volcanoes and floods in the physical. What difference does it make whether they die of a plague or the Revolution?

The steps of mankind are slow, they can only be counted by centuries. Behind each step lie the graves of generations. The achievement of the simplest inventions and principles has cost the lives of millions who died along the

way. Is it not obvious, then, that at a time when the pace of history is quicker more men get out of breath.

We will draw a quick and simple conclusion: since all are created under the same conditions, then all are equal, apart from the distinctions which nature itself has made.

Thus each may have advantages but none may have privileges, neither an individual nor a greater or lesser class of individuals. Every clause in this sentence, when turned into reality, has had its price in deaths. The 14th of July, the 10th of August, the 31st of May are its punctuation marks. It took four years for it to be completed in the physical world, and under normal circumstances it would have taken a century and been punctuated by generations. Is it then to be wondered at that the stream of revolution at every interval, at every new twist throws out its corpses?

We will need to add a few conclusions to our sentence — are a few hundred corpses to prevent us drawing them?

Moses led his people across the Red Sea into the wilderness, until the old corrupted generation had worn itself out, before he founded the new state. Legislators! We have neither the Red Sea nor the wilderness, but we have war and the guillotine. The Revolution is like the daughters of Pelias: it tears mankind apart in order to rejuvenate it. Mankind will rise up from the cauldron of blood, like the earth from the waters of the Deluge, with limbs of primeval strength, as if created for the first time.

Long, persistent applause. Some deputies get up in their enthusiasm.

ST. JUST: We call upon all the secret enemies of tyranny to share this sublime moment with us.

The audience and the deputies strike up the Marseillaise.

ACT 3

SCENE 1: The Luxembourg. A Room with Prisoners

PAYNE, LACROIX, HERAULT and other prisoners.

LACROIX: (***pulls on Payne's sleeve***) Listen, Payne, God could exist after all, it suddenly struck me just now. I've got a headache today, help me out a bit with your logic, I've really got the creeps.

PAYNE: Come on then, philosopher, I'll catechize you. *There is no God*, because: either God created the world or he didn't. If he didn't create it, then the world has its source in itself and there is no God, because God only becomes God by being the source of all being. — But: God cannot have created the world, because either creation is eternal like God or it has a beginning. If it has a beginning, then God must have created it at a particular moment, that is to say, after God had rested for an eternity he must at some point have become active, i.e. must have undergone a change within himself, which makes him subject to the concept of time, both of which conflict with the nature of God. Thus, God cannot have created the world. Since, however, we know very well that the world, or at least our own self, exists, and that, according to the argument just given, it must have its source in itself or in something which is not God, then there can be no God. Q.E.D.

LACROIX: My goodness, that makes everything clear again. Thank you, thank you!

HERAULT: Hold on, Payne! What if creation is eternal?

PAYNE: Then it is no longer "creation", because either it is one with God or it is an attribute of God; in which case God is in everything, in you, dear fellow, in our philosopher Lacroix and in me. That wouldn't be so bad, but you must admit that it doesn't say much for His Divine Majesty if, within each of us, our dear Lord can have toothache, catch the pox, be buried alive or at least have very unpleasant notions about it.

Do you regard the world as perfect?

HERAULT: No.

PAYNE: But you think that God, who is perfect, has created an imperfect world? If God has to create at all, and if he can only create something imperfect, then he would be more sensible to forget all about it. Isn't it very human only being able to conceive of God as creating? Just because we have to keep stirring and shaking ourselves just to be sure that we exist, do we have to foist the same miserable necessity on God? — Must we immediately assume that God has to stretch out his fingers and knead gingerbread men on a table, out of an effusive need of affection?

Get rid of imperfection, only then can you prove the existence of God. You can deny evil, but not pain. Only the intellect can prove God's existence, feeling rebels against it. Take note of this: "Why do I suffer?" That is the rock on which atheism is founded. The slightest twinge of pain, even if only in a single atom, rips creation apart from top to bottom.

LACROIX: True, very true!

PAYNE: He's not a believer yet, but when the time comes he'll have himself anointed, turn his feet towards Mecca and have himself circumcised, to make sure he doesn't miss the path.

LACROIX: I'm most obliged to you, gentlemen!

DANTON and CAMILLE are led in.

HERAULT: (***runs up to Danton and embraces him***) Welcome! I should say farewell!

PRISONER: (***to Payne***) Look, here's the evil genius of the Revolution.

PRISONER: He tried to violate his mother, but she was stronger than him.

PAYNE: His life and his death are equally great misfortunes.

LACROIX: (***to Danton***) I didn't think they'd come for us so soon.

DANTON: I knew, I'd been warned.

LACROIX: And you didn't say anything?

DANTON: What for? A stroke is the best death. And — I didn't think they'd dare.

HERAULT: At least we won't have callouses on our fingers when we stroke sweet Dame Putrefaction on the cheeks.

The prisoners throng around the new arrivals.

CAMILLE: (***to a prisoner***) So many unfortunates, and in such a miserable state? O Lucile! It's a great pity!

PRISONER: Did the tumbrils not tell you Paris was a slaughtering-block?

PRISONER: Yes, Camille, Equality swings its scythe over all heads, the lava of the Revolution flows, the Guillotine republicanises! You didn't realise that each of these slogans is the death rattle of a victim. Just follow your phrases to the point where they're put into practice.

PRISONER: Look around you, you said all this, it's an exact rendition of your words. These miserable folk, their executioners and the guillotine are your speeches come to life. You build your system the way the Turkish Sultan builds his pyramids, with human heads.

DANTON: You're right. Everyone deals in human flesh these days. That's the curse of our time. Now my body, too, will be used.

PRISONER: (***to Danton***) The blood of the Girondins will drown you.

PRISONER: (***to Hérault***) As you once said, Hérault, the power of the People and the power of reason are one and the same.

PRISONER: (***to Camille***) Well, Procurator General of the Lantern, your improvements in the street-lighting have not made France any brighter.

PRISONER: Leave him be! Those are the lips which spoke the word "mercy".

PRISONER embraces CAMILLE, several prisoners follow this example.

SOME VOICES: The stroke which fells you kills us all.

CAMILLE: Gentlemen, I lament the fact that our efforts were so futile, I'm going to the scaffold because my eyes grew moist at the fate of a few unfortunates.

DANTON: (***to Payne***) What you did for the benefit of your country, I have tried to do for mine. I wasn't so lucky, I'm being sent to the scaffold. I don't care, I won't stumble.

It's a year now since I created the Revolutionary Tribunal. I beg God and man's forgiveness for it; I wanted to pre-empt further massacres, I hoped to be able to save the innocent, but this slow murdering with formalities is more horrible and just as inescapable as any massacre. Ladies and Gentlemen, I hoped to get you all out of this place.

PRISONER: Oh, we'll be leaving all right.

DANTON: I'm among you now, Heaven knows how it will end.

SCENE 2: A Room

FOUQUIER-TINVILLE, HERMAN.

FOUQUIER: Everything ready, Herman?

HERMAN: It's going to be difficult to get away with. If Danton weren't one of them it would be easy.

FOUQUIER: He must lead the dance.

HERMAN: He'll frighten the jury, Fouquier, he's the scarecrow of the Revolution.

FOUQUIER: The jury will have to *want* to convict.

HERMAN: I could suggest a way, but it would offend against legal form.

FOUQUIER: Out with it!

HERMAN: We don't draw lots for the jurors, but select in advance those we can count on.

FOUQUIER: That will work. There are nineteen of them up for trial. It's a cunning mixture. The four forgers, then a few bankers and foreigners, and Danton. A spicy offering, the sort of thing the people need. Reliable men, then! Any suggestions?

HERMAN: Leroi. He's deaf and so doesn't hear a word of what the accused has to say. Danton can shout himself hoarse with him.

FOUQUIER: Very good. Carry on!

HERMAN: Vilatte and Lumière. One's always in the pub, the other is always asleep. Both of them only open their mouths to say "guilty".

Girard, he works on the principle, that no one brought before the Tribunal can be allowed to escape. Renaudin...

FOUQUIER: Him too? He once helped a few clerics to get off.

HERMAN: Don't worry! Only the other day he came to me to demand that all the condemned should have their blood let before the execution, to make them a bit dopey. He was irritated at the defiant posture most of them adopt.

FOUQUIER: Oh, very good. I'm counting on you, then!

HERMAN: Just leave it to me.

SCENE 3: The Revolutionary Tribunal

HERMAN: (***to Danton***) Your name, citizen?

DANTON: The Revolution knows my name. My home will soon be in oblivion and my name in the pantheon of history.

HERMAN: Danton, the Convention accuses you of having conspired with Mirabeau, with Dumouriez, with the Duke of Orléans, with the Girondists, the foreigners, and the faction of Louis XVII.

DANTON: My voice, which I have so often raised in the cause of the people, will rebut this slander without difficulty. Let the cowards who accuse me show their faces and I will cover them in shame. Let the Committees come forward, I will answer before them alone. I need them as accusers and as witnesses.

Let them show themselves.

In any case, why should I concern myself with you and your judgment. Life has become a burden to me, you may tear it from me, I long to shake it off.

HERMAN: Danton, audacity is the mark of the criminal, composure the mark of innocence.

DANTON: Private, individual audacity is undoubtedly to be censured, but that patriotic audacity which I have displayed so often in the fight for freedom, is the most creditable of all virtues. — It is this audacity which I here bring to bear for the good of the Republic against my pitiful accusers. How can I hold back when I see myself slandered in such a wretched manner? You cannot expect a cool defence from a revolutionary like me. Men of my stamp are priceless in a revolution, on their brows hovers the genius of freedom. (***Signs of applause among the audience.***) I am accused of having conspired with Mirabeau, with Dumouriez, with Orléans, I am accused of having crawled at the feet of miserable despots, I am asked to answer before ineluctable, unbending justice.

St. Just, you miserable wretch, you will be answerable to posterity for this blasphemy.

HERMAN: I call upon you to answer calmly, remember Marat, he came before his judges with respect.

DANTON: You have laid hands on my whole life, so I am entitled to rise up and confront you; I will bury you beneath the weight of every one of my actions.

Not that I'm proud of them. It is fate that guides our hands, but only powerful natures can be organs.

On the field of Mars I declared war on the monarchy, on the 10th of August I defeated it, on the 21st of January I threw down the a king's head as a challenge to other monarchs. (***Repeated signs of applause. He takes the accusation documents.***) If I look at these shameful accusations, I feel my whole being tremble with rage. Let my accusers appear. I will unmask these spineless villains and hurl them back into the oblivion they should never have crawled out of.

HERMAN: (***rings the bell***) Can you not hear the bell?

DANTON: The voice of a man defending his honour and his life must drown your bell.

In September I fed the young brood of the Revolution with the dismembered bodies of the aristocrats. From the gold of the wealthy my voice forged weapons for the People. My voice was the hurricane which buried the lackeys of despotism beneath waves of bayonets.

Loud applause.

HERMAN: Danton, your voice is exhausted, you are too worked up. You will conclude your defence next time. You need rest.

The session is adjourned.

DANTON: Now you know Danton; a few more hours and he will fall asleep in the arms of fame.

SCENE 4: The Luxembourg. A cell

DILLON, LAFLOTTE, a WARDER.

DILLON: Don't shine your lantern into my face like that, fellow.

LAFLOTTE: Keep your mouth shut, or your breath might catch fire.

WARDER: Ha ha ha! Do you think, sir, you could read this by its light? (***Points to a note he is holding in his hand.***)

DILLON: Give it to me! There you are, fellow. Clear off.

He gives him some money. WARDER off.

DILLON: (***reads***) Danton has frightened the Tribunal, the jury are in two minds, the audience grumbled. The crowds were extraordinary. The people thronged round the courts and back as far as the bridges. We need a handful of money, a strong arm... hm! hm! (***He walks up and down, pouring himself a drink from a bottle from time to time.***) If I could just put one foot out of the door and into the street. I'm not going to let myself be slaughtered like this. Yes, just one foot into the street!

LAFLOTTE: And straight into the tumbril.

DILLON: Do you think so? There'd be enough space in between to fill with the bodies of the Committee of Public Safety — It's about time the decent folk lifted up their heads.

LAFLOTTE: (***to himself***) All the easier to chop them off. Go on, old fellow, a few more glasses and I'll be laughing.

DILLON: The bastards, the fools, they'll end up even guillotining themselves.

He walks up and down.

LAFLOTTE: (***apart***) You could really fall in love with life again. It's not often a man can copulate with chance and give himself a new lease of life.

DILLON: You can't feed the people with corpses, the wives of Danton and Camille must distribute paper money to the people, that's better than heads.

Their hands on Danton! Who is still safe? Fear will unite them.

LAFLOTTE: He's lost. What does it matter, then, if I step on a corpse to clamber out of the grave?

DILLON: Just one foot into the street! I'll find enough people, old soldiers, Girondins, former nobles; we'll break open the prisons, we'll have to come to an understanding with the prisoners.

LAFLOTTE: Well, it's true, it does smell of treachery a bit. Who cares? I could give it a try; I've been a bit one-sided up to now. You get pangs of conscience, but it makes a change; it's not that unpleasant smelling one's own stench.

I've got bored with the prospect of the guillotine, waiting so long for the thing. I've already been through it twenty times in my mind. There's no spice left in it, it's become quite commonplace.

DILLON: Someone's got to get a note to Danton's wife.

LAFLOTTE: And then — I'm not afraid of death, but of pain. It might hurt, who can promise me otherwise? I know they say it only takes a moment, but pain has a finer timescale, it deals in fractions of a second. No! Pain is the only sin, and suffering the only vice, I shall remain virtuous.

DILLON: Listen, Laflotte, where's the fellow got to? I've got money, it must work, we must strike while the iron is hot, my plan is ready.

LAFLOTTE: Wait a moment, wait a moment! I know the jailer, I'll have a word with him. You can count on me, General, we'll get out of this dirty hole, (***to himself as he goes out***) only to land in another: me in the widest, the world, him in the narrowest, the grave.

SCENE 5: The Committee of Public Safety

ST. JUST, BARERE, BILLAUD.

ST. JUST is reading a letter.

BARERE: What does Fouquier say?

ST. JUST: The second hearing is over. The prisoners are demanding the appearance of several members of the National Convention and the Committee of Public Safety, they are appealing to the people because they have been denied witnesses. The excitement is apparently indescribable. Danton parodied Jupiter and shook his locks.

BILLAUD: All the easier for the executioner to get hold of his head.

BARERE: We can't afford to show ourselves, the fishwives and the ragmen might find us less impressive.

BILLAUD: The People has an instinct for letting itself be bullied, even if only with looks, it likes insolent faces like Danton's.

BARERE: What does Robespierre say?

ST. JUST: Nothing of any significance.

The jury must declare itself sufficiently informed and close the hearings.

BARERE: Impossible, that won't work.

ST. JUST: They must be got rid of, at any cost, even if we have to strangle them with our own hands. Just dare to! Danton won't have taught us that word in vain.

ST JUST is called out. A JAILER enters.

JAILER: In St. Pelagie there are prisoners dying, they're demanding a doctor.

BILLAUD: There's no need, all the less trouble for the executioner.

JAILER: There are pregnant women among them.

BILLAUD: All the better, their children won't need coffins.

BARERE: The aristocracy's consumption will spare the Revolutionary Tribunal a session. Any medicine would be counter-revolutionary.

BILLAUD: (***takes a piece of paper***) A petition, a woman's name!

BARERE: Probably one of those who'd like to be forced to choose between the boards of the guillotine and the bed of a Jacobin.

BILLAUD: She's too old. The lady insists on death, she knows how to express herself: prison, she says, weighs on her like a coffin-lid. She's only been there four weeks. The answer is simple. (***He writes and reads***) 'Citizen, you haven't been wishing for death long enough'.

JAILER off.

BARERE: Well said!

ST JUST returns.

ST. JUST: I've just received a denunciation. There's a conspiracy in the prisons, a young man by the name of Laflotte has discovered everything. He was in a room with General Dillon, Dillon got drunk and talked.

BARERE: He's cutting his head off with a bottle, he's not the first to do that.

ST. JUST: The plan is for the wives of Danton and Camille to distribute money among the people, Dillon breaks out, the prisoners are freed, the Convention broken up.

BARERE: Fairy-tales!

ST. JUST: But this is a fairy-tale we'll put them to sleep with. To this charge, add the insolence of the prisoners, the grumbling of the people, the dismay of the jury, I'll make a report.

The Convention must decree that the Revolutionary Tribunal is to continue the trial without interruption and may exclude from the hearings any of the accused who shows disrespect to the court or causes disruptions.

BARERE: You've got an instinct for revolution, that sounds very moderate and will still have its effect. They can't keep quiet, Danton can't help shouting.

ST. JUST: I'm counting on your support. There are people in the Convention who are just as diseased as Danton and who fear the same cure. They've regained confidence, they will protest about the violation of proper procedure.

ST. JUST off.

BARERE: Did you hear the word "cure". They'll make the guillotine a remedy for the clap yet. They're not fighting the moderates, they're fighting Vice.

Robespierre wants to turn the Revolution into a lecture-room for morality and use the guillotine as a lectern.

BILLAUD: Or a prayer-stool.

When are you coming down to the whores at Clichy again?

BARERE: When the doctor's stopped treating me for the clap. Shh! The Incorruptible mustn't know about it.

BILLAUD: He's an impotent Mahommed.

Off.

SCENE 6: The Conciergerie

LACROIX, DANTON, HERAULT, CAMILLE.

LACROIX: You shouted well, Danton; if you'd really made an effort to save your life a bit sooner, things would be different now. It makes a difference, doesn't it, when death comes so shamelessly close to you, with its bad breath, and gets more and more insistent?

CAMILLE: If death just assaulted you and seized his prize from your hot limbs with a fierce struggle! But like this, with all these formalities, it's like getting married to an old woman, the way the contracts are drawn up, the witnesses called, the amen said and then the blanket lifted and she creeps into your bed with her cold limbs!

Enter WARDER.

WARDER: Citizen Lacroix.

LACROIX off.

DANTON: If only it was a fight, with arms and teeth locked in combat. But I feel as if I've fallen into a mill, and my limbs are being slowly and systematically twisted off by the cold physical power. To be killed so mechanically!

CAMILLE: And then to lie there alone, cold, stiff in the damp vapours of corruption; what if death tortures the life out of your fibres inch by inch, what if you rot away with full consciousness!

HERAULT: Don't worry, my friends. We're the autumn crocus which only bears seeds after the winter. The only difference between us and flowers that are replanted is that we stink a bit in the process. Is that so bad?

DANTON: An edifying prospect! From one dung-heap onto the other! From the first form to the second, from the second to the third and so on? I've had enough of school benches, I've got callouses on my bum from sitting there like an ape.

HERAULT: What do you want, then?

DANTON: Peace.

HERAULT: Peace is in God.

DANTON: In oblivion. I'm an atheist.

WARDER: Citizen Hérault-Séchelles.

HERAULT off.

DANTON: The accursed sentence: something cannot become nothing! and I am something, that's the pity!

CAMILLE: Oh, not being able to die, not being able to die! as the old song says.

DANTON: We're all buried alive and laid to rest like kings in three- or four-layered coffins, beneath the sky, in our houses, in our coats and shirts.

For fifty years we scratch at the coffin-lid. Yes, the man who could believe in annihilation, he'd be all right.

There's no hope in death; it's only a simpler form of putrefaction, and life a more complicated, more organized one, that's all the difference!

But I just happen to be used to this form of putrefaction; the devil knows how I'll get used to the other one.

Oh, Julie! If I went *alone*! If she abandoned me!

Even if I disintegrated completely, dissolved completely, I'd still be a handful of tortured dust, and each of my atoms could find peace only with her.

I can't die, no, I can't die. We must cry out, they'll have to tear every drop of life from my body.

WARDER: Citizen Danton!

DANTON off.

CAMILLE: (***writing***) Last night I slept well. When you sleep, you are free; you no longer feel as if you are imprisoned; heaven has had mercy on me. It seems only a moment ago that I saw you in a dream, I embraced you all, one after another, you, Horace and your mother, who was at home; but our little one had lost an eye from some illness which had afflicted it and the pain of this misfortune woke me. I found myself back in my cell. It was already starting to

get light. But when I opened the window, the thought of my loneliness, the fearful bars and the bolts which separate me from you destroyed all my powers of resistance. I burst into tears, or rather I sobbed and cried out in my grave ‘Lucile! Lucile! Oh, my dear Lucile, where are you!’

My glasses are not very good. I’d like you to buy me a pair like the ones I had six months ago, not silver but steel with two bows which cling to the side of the head. You must ask for number 15: the shopkeeper will know what it means. But above all, Lolotte, in the name of my eternal love for you, send me your picture. May your painter take pity on me who is only suffering because I had too much sympathy with others; let him have two sittings a day.

WARDER: Citizen Desmoulins!

CAMILLE: (writing) I’m being called...

CAMILLE off.

SCENE 7: The Revolutionary Tribunal

FOUQUIER, ST. JUST, BILLAUD, BARERE.

FOUQUIER: I just don't know what to say any more, Danton is demanding an enquiry.

ST. JUST: We've got the rogues, here's what you want. (***He gives FOUQUIER a document.***) That will satisfy them.

FOUQUIER: Oh yes, that's what we needed.

ST. JUST: Make sure that the business is finally settled for us and for them.

Act 3, Scene 7a Full Text

DANTON, HERAULT, LACROIX and CAMILLE are brought in.

DANTON: The Republic is in danger, and he has no instructions! We demand a commission of enquiry, to be set up by the Convention. We appeal to the People; my voice is still strong enough to deliver the funeral oration of the Committee of Public Safety.

I repeat, we demand a commission, we have important discoveries to make. I shall withdraw to the citadel of reason, I shall break out with the canon of truth and crush my enemies.

Signs of applause.

FOUQUIER: Silence in the name of the Republic, respect for the law! The convention has resolved:

In consideration of the fact that there are signs of mutiny in the prisons, in consideration of the fact that the wives of Danton and Camille are planning to distribute money among the people and that General Dillon intends to break out and place himself at the head of the rebels in order to release the accused, and finally in consideration of the fact that the aforementioned have themselves striven to bring about disruption and attempted to insult the Tribunal, the Tribunal is empowered to continue the examination without

interruption and to exclude from the hearings any of the accused who fails to show due respect for the law!

DANTON: I ask those present, whether we have mocked the Tribunal, the people or the National Convention?

MANY VOICES: No! No!

CAMILLE: The wretches, they are trying to murder my Lucile!

DANTON: One day the truth will be acknowledged. I see great misfortune coming over France. This is dictatorship. It has torn aside its veil, it bears its head high, it is marching over our corpses. (***Pointing to Billaud and Barère***) Look at the cowardly murderers, look at the ravens of the Committee of Public Safety!

I accuse Robespierre, St. Just, and their executioners of high treason.

They are trying to choke the Republic with blood. The tracks of the tumbrils are the military road along which the foreigners are to penetrate into the heart of our nation.

How long must the footprints of freedom be graves?

You want bread, and they throw you heads! You are thirsty and they make you lick the blood from the steps of the guillotine.

Great tumult among the audience, shouts of applause.

MANY VOICES: Long live Danton! Down with the Committee!

The prisoners are removed by force.

SCENE 8: Outside the Palais de Justice

A throng of people.

VOICES: Down with the Committee! Long live Danton!

CITIZEN: Yes, he's right, they do give us heads instead of bread, blood instead of wine!

CITIZEN: The guillotine is a bad flourmill.

CITIZEN: And the executioner a bad baker's lad, we want bread, bread!

CITIZEN: Your bread's been eaten by Danton. His head will give you all bread again.

CITIZEN: Danton was among us on the 10th of August, Danton was among us in September. Where were the people who have accused him?

CITIZEN: And Lafayette was with us in Versailles and was still a traitor.

CITIZEN: Who says Danton's a traitor?

CITIZEN: Robespierre.

CITIZEN: And Robespierre is a traitor!

CITIZEN: Who says so?

CITIZEN: Danton.

CITIZEN: Danton's got beautiful clothes, Danton's got a beautiful house, Danton's got a beautiful wife, he bathes in Burgundy, eats game from silver platters and sleeps with your wives and daughters, when he's drunk. Danton was poor like you. Where's he got it all from?

The King bought it for him, so he'd save the crown for him.

CITIZEN: The Duke of Orléans gave it to him, so that he'd steal the crown for *him*.

CITIZEN: The foreigners gave it to him, so that he'd betray us all.

CITIZEN: What has Robespierre got? virtuous Robespierre. You all know him.

ALL: Long live Robespierre! Down with Danton! Down with the traitor!

ACT 4

SCENE 1: A Room in Danton's house

JULIE, a BOY.

JULIE: That's it. They're afraid of him. They're killing him out of fear. Go, I've seen him for the last time, tell him I couldn't face seeing him the way he is now.

She gives the BOY a lock of her hair.

There, take this to him and tell him he won't be going alone. He'll know what I mean, and then come back quickly, I want to see his look in your eyes.

SCENE 2: The Conciergerie

LACROIX and HERAULT (on one bed), DANTON and CAMILLE (on another).

LACROIX: The way your hair grows, and your nails, it really makes you feel ashamed of yourself.

HERAULT: Be a bit more careful, every time you sneeze I get a faceful of grit.

LACROIX: And don't tread on my feet like that, my friend, I've got corns.

HERAULT: You've still got lice.

LACROIX: Oh, if I could just get rid of the beasts!

HERAULT: Sleep well, we'll have to see how we get on with each other, we haven't got much room.

CAMILLE: (***writing***) The Revolutionary Tribunal has given me a hearing today. I was asked whether I had conspired against the Republic. How ridiculous! Can they really insult the purest republicanism in this way! Farewell, my Lucile, my dear Lolotte; say farewell to my father too.

I was born to write, to defend the unfortunate, to make you happy, to live with your mother and my father and a few other people after our own hearts. I'd dreamt of a Republic the whole world would have admired. I would never have believed that men were so bloodthirsty and so unjust.

I can feel the shore of life disappearing. I can still see Lucile! I can see her, the one I love so dearly! My Lucile! My tied hands embrace you, my head, even when sundered from its body, will still rest its dying eyes on you!

HERAULT: Don't scratch me with your nails in your sleep. There!

LACROIX: Don't pull on the blanket like that, it's cold!

DANTON: Yes, Camille, tomorrow we'll be worn-out shoes thrown into the lap of that beggarwoman we call the earth.

CAMILLE: My Lucile!

DANTON: Calm down, my boy!

CAMILLE: Can I? Do you think so, Danton? Can I? They can't lay a hand on her! The light of beauty which pours forth from her sweet body is inextinguishable. Impossible! No, the earth would not dare to consume her, it would arch above her, the vapour of the grave would sparkle like dew on her lashes, crystals would unfold like flowers around her limbs and bright springs would lull her to sleep.

DANTON: Sleep, my boy, sleep!

CAMILLE: Listen, Danton, between you and me, it's so wretched having to die. It doesn't get us anywhere. I want to steal the last glances from the lovely eyes of life, I want to keep my eyes open.

DANTON: You'll keep them open anyway. They don't close your eyes for you when they chop your head off. Sleep is more merciful. Sleep, my boy, sleep!

CAMILLE: Lucile, your kisses play upon my lips; every kiss becomes a dream, my eyes close and hold it safe.

DANTON: Will the clock never rest? With every tick it pushes the walls in closer around me, until they're as narrow as a coffin.

I once read a story like that when I was a child, it made my hair stand on end.

Yes, when I was a child! It was worth the trouble, feeding me up and keeping me warm. Just more work for the gravedigger!

I feel as if I stink already. My dear body, we've spent quite some time together till now.

Tomorrow you'll be a broken fiddle, its melody played out. Tomorrow you'll be an empty bottle, the wine's all drunk but I'll go sober to bed. They're lucky people who can still get drunk. Tomorrow you'll be a worn-out pair of trousers, you'll be thrown into the wardrobe and the moths will eat you, no matter how much you stink.

Oh, it doesn't help. Oh yes, it's so wretched having to die. Death mimics birth, when we die we're as naked and helpless as newborn babes.

We even get a winding-sheet for swaddling clothes. What use will it be? We can whimper as well in the grave as we can in the cot.

Camille! He's asleep, (bending over him) a dream flits between his eyelids. I shan't wipe the golden dew of sleep from his eyes.

He gets up and goes to the window.

I shan't be going alone, thank you, Julie! But I would have liked to die differently, quite effortlessly, the way a star falls, the way a note dies away, kisses itself to death with its own lips, the way a beam of light buries itself in clear waters. —

The stars are sprinkled across the night like shimmering tears, there must be a great sorrow in the eye that wept them.

CAMILLE: Oh! (***He has sat up and is reaching out for the ceiling.***)

DANTON: What's the matter, Camille?

CAMILLE: Oh, oh!

DANTON: (***shakes him***) Are you trying to tear down the ceiling?

CAMILLE: Oh, my love, my love, oh, hold me, speak, my love!

DANTON: You're shaking all over, there's sweat on your forehead.

CAMILLE: It's you that I..., there! That's my hand! yes, now I know what happened. Oh Danton, that was terrible!

DANTON: What was?

CAMILLE: I lay between dream and waking. Then the ceiling disappeared and the moon came down, very near, very close, my arm took hold of it. The firmament with its lights had come down, I pushed against it, I touched the stars, I reeled like a drowning man beneath a sheet of ice. It was terrible, Danton!

DANTON: The lamp's casting a circle of light onto the ceiling, that's what you saw.

CAMILLE: I suppose so, it doesn't exactly take much to rob a man of the little reason he's got. Madness had got me by the scruff of the neck. (He gets up.) I don't want to sleep any more, I don't want to go mad. (***He reaches out for a book.***)

DANTON: What's that?

CAMILLE: “Night Thoughts”.

DANTON: Do you want to die in advance. I’ll have “The Maiden”. I don’t want to leave life as if it’s a prayer-stool, but as if it’s the bed of a Sister of Mercy. Life’s a whore, it fornicates with the whole world.

SCENE 3: Outside the Conciergerie

A JAILER, TWO CARTERS with carts, WOMEN.

JAILER: What are you doing ‘ere?

CARTER 1: Ear? I’m not called Ear, what a funny name!

JAILER: Idiot, who commissioned you?

CARTER 1: I don’t know anything about commission, I just get ten sous a head.

CARTER 2: The bastard’s trying to do me out of my bread.

CARTER 1: What are you calling your bread? (***Pointing to the windows of the prisoners***) That’s worm-fodder.

CARTER 2: My kids are worms too, and they want their share. Oh, it’s a hard life in our line of work, although we’re the best drivers.

CARTER 1: What do you mean?

CARTER 2: Who’s the best driver?

CARTER 1: The one who drives furthest and fastest.

CARTER 2: Well, you dolt, who drives further than the man who drives out of this world, and who drives faster than the man who does it in a quarter of an hour? It’s precisely a quarter of an hour from here to the Place de la Révolution.

JAILER: Hurry up, you lazy sods! Nearer the gate. Move aside, girls!

CARTER 1: Stay where you are! You don’t drive round a girl, you go straight up the middle.

CARTER 2: Yes, you’re not kidding, you can drive in there with your horse and cart, and you’ll find a well-worn track, but you have to go into quarantine when you come out.

They drive forwards.

CARTER 1: (***to the women***) What are you lot gawping at?

WOMAN: We're waiting for some of our old customers.

CARTER 1: Do you think my cart's a brothel? It's a respectable cart, it's carried the king and all the fine gents from Paris to the dinner-table.

Enter LUCILE. She sits on a stone beneath the prisoners' window.

LUCILE: Camille, Camille!

CAMILLE appears at the window.

You know, Camille, you make me laugh with your long stone coat and that iron mask in front of your face, can't you reach down? Where are your arms? I will catch you with song, dear little bird.

(***Sings***) "There are two little stars in the sky
Shining brighter than the moon
One shines through darling's window
The other on the chamber door."

Come, my friend! Come quietly, they're all asleep. The moon's been helping me to wait so long. You're not moving, why don't you say something? You frighten me. Listen! People are putting on such serious faces and saying you've got to die.

Die! I can't help laughing at their faces. Die! What sort of word is that? Tell me, Camille. Die! Let me think about it. There, that's it. I'll run after him; come, my sweet friend, help me catch him, come! come!

She runs off.

CAMILLE: (***calls***) Lucile! Lucile!

SCENE 4: The Conciergerie

DANTON, CAMILLE, LACROIX, HERAULT.

CAMILLE: (***aside***) There was madness at the back of her eyes. She's not the first one to go mad. What can we do about it? We wash our hands. It's better that way.

DANTON: I'm leaving everything in a terrible mess. None of them knows how to govern. Things might still be alright perhaps if I left my whores to Robespierre. But I don't give him more than six months, I'll drag him down with me.

LACROIX: The dolts will shout "Long live the Republic", as we pass.

DANTON: What does that matter?

HERAULT: There's no more convincing proof that Robespierre is a Nero than the fact that he was never more friendly to Camille than two days before his arrest. Isn't that so, Camille?

CAMILLE: If you say so, why should I care?

What a sweet child of a madness she has given birth to! Why do I have to go now? Together we'd have laughed with him, rocked him in the cradle and kissed him.

DANTON: If history ever open its graves, despotism might still choke to death on the smell of our corpses.

HERAULT: We stank quite enough while we were alive.

These are phrases for posterity, eh, Danton, they're really no concern of ours.

CAMILLE: Just don't put on such virtuous and clever and heroic and genial expressions, we know each other after all, save yourselves the trouble.

We ought to take off our masks for once, then everywhere we'd see, infinitely repeated, as if in a mirrored room, only a single, primeval, imperishable blockhead, nothing more, nothing less. The differences aren't that great. Why do we have to stand on tiptoe and make faces, why do we have to feel

embarrassed in front of others? We've all eaten ourselves sick at the same table and got stomach ache, what are you hiding behind your napkins for? Just scream and cry, as it takes you!

HERAULT: Yes, Camille, let's sit down side by side and cry out, there's nothing more stupid than keeping your lips tightly shut when something hurts you.

Greeks and Gods cried out, Romans and Stoics put on the heroic look.

DANTON: They were all Epicureans, the ones as much as the others. They managed to feel quite at ease with themselves. It's not so bad to arrange one's toga and look to see if one casts a long shadow. Why should we argue about it? What does it matter whether we cover our privates in laurels, or rosaries or vine-leaves, or just wear the ugly things openly and let the dogs lick at them?

LACROIX: My friends, you don't need to stand very high above the earth for all this confused reeling and flickering to disappear and for your vision to be filled with a few great, divine lines. There is an ear to which the confused shouting and pandemonium which deafens us is a stream of harmonies.

DANTON: But we're the poor musicians and our bodies are the instruments. Are the hideous notes we manage to scrape out of them only there to penetrate higher and higher until they eventually die away like an ecstatic breath in heavenly ears?

CAMILLE: Are we like pigs intended for princely tables who are whipped to death with sticks so they taste better?

HERAULT: Are we children roasted in the burning arms of the Moloch we call the world, and tickled with rays of light, so that the gods can delight in their laughter?

DANTON: The world is Chaos. Oblivion is the god of the world yet to be born.

The JAILER comes in.

JAILER: Gentlemen, you may depart, the carts are waiting at the door.

LACROIX: Good night, my friends! Let us calmly draw over us the great cover beneath which all hearts cease to beat and all eyes fall shut.

They embrace each other.

HERAULT: (***taking CAMILLE'S arm***) Cheer up, Camille, we've got a lovely night for it. The clouds hang in the silent evening sky like expiring, sinking gods on a cooling Mount Olympus.

They go off.

SCENE 5: A Room in Danton's house

JULIE: The people were running through the streets, now everything is quiet.

I don't want to let him wait a moment longer.

She gets out a phial. She goes to the window.

It's so sweet to say goodbye, all I've got to do is close the door behind me.

She drinks.

To stand here like this for ever!

The sun's gone down. The earth's features were so strong in its light, but now its face is as calm and solemn as the face of a dying woman. How beautifully the light of evening plays on her brow and cheeks.

Paler and paler she grows, drifting like a corpse down the river of the ether; is there no arm to catch her by her golden tresses, to lift her from the water and bury her?

I'll go gently. I won't kiss her, so that no breath, no sigh shall wake her from her slumbers.

She dies.

SCENE 6: La Place de la Révolution

The carts drive up and stop in front of the guillotine. Men and women are singing and dancing the Carmagnole. The prisoners strike up the Marseillaise.

WOMAN WITH CHILDREN: Make way! Make way! My kids are screaming with hunger. I've got to make them watch, so they'll shut up. Make way!

WOMAN: Hey, Danton, now you can fornicate with the worms!

WOMAN: Hérault, I'm going to get myself a wig made out of your lovely hair.

HERAULT: I haven't got enough to cover a furrow as well ploughed as yours.

CAMILLE: You damned hags!

DANTON: (*to Camille*) Calm down, my boy, you've shouted yourself hoarse.

CAMILLE: (*gives money to the carter*) There you are, old Charon, your cart is a fine platter.

Gentlemen, I will serve myself first. This is a classical banquet, we lie on our couches and sprinkle a little blood by way of libation. Adieu, Danton!

He ascends the scaffold, the prisoners follow him, one after the other. Danton comes last.

LACROIX: (*to the crowd*) You're killing us on the day you've lost your reason. You'll kill them on the day you get it back.

VOICES: We've heard that one before. Boring!

LACROIX: The tyrants will trip on our graves and break their necks.

HERAULT: (*to Danton*) He sees his body as a compost-heap for freedom.

LACROIX: (*on the scaffold*) I forgive you; may your hour of death be no more bitter than mine.

HERAULT: Just as I thought, he has to reach under his jacket again and show the people down there he's got clean underwear. Farewell, Danton! This is a double death.

DANTON: Adieu, my friend! The guillotine is the best doctor.

HERAULT: (***tries to embrace Danton***) Oh, Danton, I can't even manage a joke. The time has come.

An EXECUTIONER pushes him back.

DANTON: (***to the executioner***) Are you trying to be crueller than death? Can you stop our heads kissing at the bottom of the basket?

You must show my head to the people, it's worth seeing.

Act 4, Scene 6a Full Text

LUCILE: There's something about it that's almost serious after all. Let me think about it. I'm beginning to understand the sort of thing. "Die" — "die" —

Everything is allowed to live, everything, that little midge there, that bird. So why not him? The stream of life would have to come to a standstill, if even a single drop were spilt. The earth couldn't help but be wounded by such a stroke.

Everything is in motion, the clocks are striking, the bells are ringing, the people are running, the water's flowing, and everything goes on until then, then — no! it must not be allowed to happen, no — I'll sit on the ground and cry out so that everything stands still in fright, everything stops, nothing stirs any more.

She sits down, covers her eyes and lets out a scream. After a pause she gets up.

It doesn't make any difference, everything's just as it was, the houses, the street, the wind's blowing, the clouds passing. — I suppose we have to put up with it.

Some WOMEN come down the street.

WOMAN: A good-looking man, that Hérault!

WOMAN: The way he stood by the triumphal arch at the Festival of the Constitution, I thought then, there's one who'll look good on the guillotine, I thought. I had a feeling about it.

WOMAN: Yes, you've got to see people in all situations.

WOMAN: It's good that dying's getting so public.

They pass by.

LUCILE: My Camille! Where should I seek you now?

Off.

Act 4, Scene 6b Full Text

TWO EXECUTIONERS, busy at the guillotine.

EXEC 1: (***Stands on the guillotine and sings.***)
"When I make my way back home
The moon's still shining bright."

EXEC 2: Hey there! You almost finished?

EXEC 1: In a minute, in a minute!

(***Sings.***)
But my old grandpa shouts at me,
'Where you been all night?'"

Right! Give us me jacket!

They go off singing.

LUCILE enters and sits on the steps of the guillotine.

LUCILE: Let me sit in your lap, you silent angel of death,

(***Sings.***) "Death walks the Earth, a scythe in hand,
He follows God's decree."

You dear cradle, who have rocked my Camille to sleep, have smothered him among your roses.

You funeral bell, who sang him with your sweet tongue into his grave.

(***Sings.***) "He reaps and reaps, so many souls.
Not one of them can flee."

A patrol appears.

CITIZEN: Hey, who goes there?

LUCILE: Long live the King!

CITIZEN: In the name of the Republic!

She is surrounded by the patrol and led away.

Notes on the Playscript

Introduction

The main types of change introduced in the Playscript:

Structure

- Some minor characters, those who appear in only one or two scenes and have little to say, have been cut and their dialogue given to another.
- The only major character cut is PHILIPPEAU. Although he appears in six scenes, he has only one or two speeches in each, and these are easily allocated elsewhere, since there are always at least three other Dantonists on stage.
- Some of the longer speeches by anonymous CITIZENs have been split between several speakers.
- To cut down on scene changes (which may slow the play down) some short scenes have been elided with a nearby longer scene which takes place in the same or a similar location.
- Act 4, Scene 2 has been cut.
- Some comic banter cut — hard to translate well and not very funny.
- The order of the first two scenes has been switched to give a more dramatic start and to contextualise the Dantonists' discussion.
- The scene locations have been specified more precisely — where Büchner has "A Room", we have stated where that room is, if this is clear from the dialogue.
- We have made two additions taken directly from historical sources:
    - the addresses of the women to the Jacobin Club (Act 1, Scene 3)
    - CAMILLE's last letter to LUCILE (Act 3, Scene 6 and Act 4, Scene 2).
- Some of the changes made in rehearsal were specific to the director's decisions about the staging or casting of our production and are therefore not reflected in the text presented here.

Wording

- Allusive historical references to events and personalities of the Revolution have been paraphrased where it seemed necessary.

- References to persons and episodes from classical antiquity that are not generally familiar have been clarified or cut.
- Longer speeches, both public and private, have often been trimmed, particularly where there is a long sequence of images.
- The play's songs are almost entirely German folk songs; they would have been known to Büchner's readers but cannot have the same resonance for a modern non-German audience looking at scenes set in Paris. They have been left only very loosely translated, so that there is something for a director to work with in finding suitable musical settings or, indeed, alternatives.

The main individual changes for each scene are listed below.

Act 1

Scenes 1 and 2

We share Maxwell's view that the street scene is a better way to start the play, both from a dramatic and a thematic perspective.

Scene 1

CITIZEN speeches distributed more widely.

Mention of Hébertists added to complete the list of threats, real or supposed, to the revolution.

Cuts: Some comic banter.
Singing (the words are from a contemporary topical song).
ROBESPIERRE's thunder and lighting reference to Exodus 20.

Scene 2

Büchner's stage direction says "some ladies"; we went for two, with one speaking part.

JULIE's "dark eyes, curly hair" may need to be changed to match the features of the actress cast in the role.

HERAULT and CAMILLE are not actually named until Scene 5. We make sure the audience knows who they are from the start.

PHILIPPEAU replaced by LACROIX. In this scene the four main Dantonists have now been introduced, identified and established as a group.

Some redistribution of dialogue between HERAULT, CAMILLE and LACROIX. (Much of this is taken from published sources and serves no function of individual characterisation.)

Explanation of "Marat's calculation" added.

Cuts: Some trimming of DANTON at the start
CAMILLE's "classical Republicans" speech
HéRAULT's "Advocate of Arras" speech.

Scene 3

Since Büchner took so many of the play's public speeches directly from published accounts, we felt justified in adding some material to represent the otherwise limited contribution of women to the revolution. The speeches of the ARTIST and the LAUNDRESS (and ROBESPIERRE's responses) are taken from Darlene Gay Levy (ed.), *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795* (University of Illinois Press, 1981). It also gives two female cast members an opportunity for a longer speech.

The MAN FROM LYONS: allusive historical detail clarified.

COLLOT has a single speech here and he is otherwise involved only in the Committee of Public Safety meeting in Act 2, Scene 5. We have here given his speech to another Committee member, BILLAUD.

ROBESPIERRE's closing speech: some detail cut.

Scene 3b

Büchner's brief Scene 4 takes place in the street after the meeting. The change of scene itself is of no importance, so we have LACROIX and LEGENDRE remaining in the Jacobin Club, when the others leave, thus avoiding a scene change for such a brief scene.

Some changes needed to replace references lost in trimming of Jacobin Club speeches.

Scene 4

Cuts: Some of the banter with the whores.

"The dagger of Cato" is what LEGENDRE actually said historically. Here Büchner has LACROIX refer to this obliquely as "wrapping himself in his toga".

PARIS cut (he has merely one speech here, a non-speaking appearance in the next scene, and two sentences in Act 2, Scene 1). His place here is taken by HERAULT. In the production we had the speeches shared between HERAULT and LACROIX,

as it might seem odd to have HERAULT not joining in the discussion, but they are here left as in the original.

Scene 5

DANTON has a non-speaking companion here. It is PARIS in the original, but essentially anonymous, so it can be any unnamed man.

Cuts: Extended ship metaphor in ROBESPIERRE's "Go, then!" monologue.
Letter text trimmed.

Act 2

Scene 1

PARIS and PHILIPPEAU cut. Their few brief speeches given to HERAULT and LACROIX.

Scene 2

On stage we replaced SIMON with an anonymous CITIZEN, but there is no reason to reflect that in this text,

Büchner's "Cornelia" we replaced with the more obviously Roman "Agrippina" to make the point unmissable.

Unfortunately, there now seems to be no record of the music we used for the songs in this scene. Büchner has used German folk songs, obviously not appropriate. The lyrics offered here are meant only as loose parallels — placeholders. A director will need to find something suitable or have these, or something better, set to music.

The song sung by the SOLDIER and ROSALIE has not been identified and may perhaps be of Büchner's own invention. Again, our text is very loose.

Scene 3: A Room in Camille's House

Büchner: "A Room". LUCILE's final monologue suggests it is her home.

Some trimming and reworking of CAMILLE's opening speech.

LUCILE's song is a Hessian folk-song, here very loosely paraphrased. Any lyrics about parting would fit here.

Scene 4: Open Ground

No significant changes.

Scene 5: A Room in Danton's House

Büchner: “A Room”. Obviously the Danton home.

Büchner has JULIE address her husband sometimes as 'Danton', sometimes as 'Georg'. We had her use 'Georges' consistently here.

Scene 6: Street outside Danton’s house

We added some women to the scene.

Joking banter between SIMON and 1ST CITIZEN trimmed.

Scene 7: The National Convention

Büchner does not identify the CHAIRMAN. Historically, on this date it would have been Jean-Lambert Tallien, but we have given the job to ST JUST, who had been chairman three weeks earlier and has to be in the scene anyway.

Some cuts to ROBERPIERRE’s long speech.

Act 3

Scene 1: The Luxembourg. A Room with Prisoners

CHAUMETTE and MERCIER cut. LACROIX brought in early to take up CHAUMETTE’s speeches, MERCIER’s given to HERAULT and other unnamed PRISONERS.

Opening religious discussion considerably trimmed.

PHILIPPEAU and his single sentence cut.

After Danton’s entry, the text of Scene 3, which Büchner places in a corridor at the Luxembourg, is incorporated, with some re-ordering of the speeches.

Scene 2: A Room

Instead of locating this in an office, we set this in an art gallery to suggest plotting away from the normal place of business.

Original Scene 3: The Luxembourg. A Corridor

This scene, a brief exchange between DANTON and MERCIER, incorporated into Scene 1, avoiding two set changes between brief scenes.

Scene 3: The Revolutionary Tribunal

A few sentences from DANTON cut.

Scene 4: The Luxembourg. A cell

Some banter with WARDER cut.

Slight trimming of LAFLOTTE.

Scene 5: The Committee of Public Safety

Cuts: COLLOT — his lines reassigned to BILLAUD.
Some of the imagery.
BARERE's final monologue.

Scene 6: The Conciergerie

PHILIPPEAU cut, HERAULT added to take his lines.

Added a WARDER, who collects the prisoners one by one.

CAMILLE's letter added, a shortened version of the actual text of his last letter to LUCILE (From Jules Claretie, *Camille Desmoulins and his Wife*, Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1876).

Scene 7: The Revolutionary Tribunal

Büchner's very brief Scene 8 (set in "A Room") moved to the Revolutionary Tribunal and thus combined with his Scene 9.

AMAR and VOULAND, who only speak in this scene and are neither named nor explained, replaced by ST. JUST. DANTON points to them in the Tribunal session itself — here replaced by BARERE and BILLAUD.

Scene 8: Outside the Palais de Justice

"Samson" clarified as the executioner.

Long speech split between several citizens.

Act 4

Scene 1: A Room in Danton's House

We in fact had this as the end of the previous scene, making JULIE witness the scene outside the Tribunal.

Original Scene 2

Scene cut. No need to introduce the character of DUMAS just for this not very important conversation. (Some editors, incidentally, believe that Büchner intended this scene to open Act 4.)

Scene 2: The Conciergerie

Added the continuation of CAMILLE's letter.

Slight trimming; some rewording.

"La Pucelle" in the original refers to Voltaire's "La Pucelle d'Orléans" ("The Maid of Orléans"), but Joan of Arc and "Maid" don't clearly signal the salacious intent of Danton's remark, hence "Maiden", though the reference to Voltaire is necessarily lost.

Scene 3: Outside the Conciergerie

Again LUCILE's song is a German folk song.

Scene 4: The Conciergerie

Cuts: Danton's opening exchange with the offstage FABRE.
PHILIPPEAU; his two speeches given to LACROIX.
CAMILLE's imagery significantly trimmed.

Scene 5: A Room in Danton's house

Büchner simply says "A Room".

Scene 6: Place de la Révolution

FABRE's single sentence cut. This is his only appearance on stage.

LUCILE's Scene 8 ("A Street") moved to the Place de la Révolution to save two scene changes. The final three scenes treated as one.

The EXECUTIONER's song is another German folk song, here translated very loosely. There seems be no link to the context, so any song appropriate to the character would do here.

Georg Büchner: *Danton's Death*

Full Text

Translation

by
Peter Christian

ACT 1
SCENE 1: A Room
SCENE 2: A Street
SCENE 3: The Jacobin Club
SCENE 4: A Street
SCENE 5: A Room
SCENE 6: A Room
ACT 2
SCENE 1: A Room
SCENE 2: A Promenade
SCENE 3: A Room
SCENE 4: Open Ground
SCENE 5: A Room
SCENE 6: Street outside Danton's House
SCENE 7: The National Convention
ACT 3
SCENE 1: The Luxembourg. A Room with Prisoners
SCENE 2: A Room
SCENE 3: The Luxembourg. A Corridor
SCENE 4: The Revolutionary Tribunal
SCENE 5: The Luxembourg. A cell
SCENE 6: The Committee of Public Safety
SCENE 7: The Conciergerie
SCENE 8: A Room
SCENE 9: The Revolutionary Tribunal
SCENE 10: Outside the Palais de Justice

ACT 4

SCENE 1: A Room
SCENE 2: A Street
SCENE 3: La Conciergerie
SCENE 4: Outside the Conciergerie
SCENE 5: The Conciergerie
SCENE 6: A Room
SCENE 7: La Place de la Révolution
SCENE 8: A Street
SCENE 9: Place de la Révolution

Characters

Deputies of the National Convention

GEORGES DANTON
LEGENDRE
CAMILLE DESMOULINS
HéRAULT-SéCHELLES
LACROIX
PHILIPPEAU
FABRE D'éGLANTINE
MERCIER
THOMAS PAYNE

Members of the Committee of Public Safety

ROBESPIERRE
ST. JUST
BARRÈRE
COLLOT D'HERBOIS
BILLAUD-VARENNES

Presidents of the Revolutionary Tribunal

HERRMANN
DUMAS

AMAR
VOULAND
CHAUMETTE, Chief Procurator of the Commune
FOUQUIER-TINVILLE, Public Prosecutor

PARIS,a friend of Danton
SIMON, prompter
His Wife
DILLON, a General
LAFLOTTE
JULIE, Danton's Wife
LUCILE, Camille's Wife

Prostitutes

ROSALIE
ADELAIDE
MARION

Citizens, prostitutes, deputies, executioners, etc.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

HERAULT-SECHELLES, some LADIES (at the card table), DANTON, JULIE (a bit further off, Danton on a stool at Julie's feet).

DANTON: Look at the lovely lady, look how nicely she plays her cards! Oh yes, she knows how to do it! They say she always offers her heart to her husband and her diamond to other men. — You could even make a man fall for a lie like that.

JULIE: Do you trust me?

DANTON: How should I know! We know so little of each other. We're thick-skinned creatures, we reach out for one another, but it's just a waste of effort, all we do is rub off our coarse hides on each other. We're very lonely.

JULIE: You know me, Danton.

DANTON: That's what they call it! You're my wife. You've got dark eyes, curly hair and a fine complexion and you're always saying 'Dear Georges' to me. But (***points at her eyes and forehead***) there, there, what's behind there. Come on, our senses are crude. Know one another? We'd have to break open each other's skulls and tear the thoughts out from the fibres of the brain.

LADY: What are you up to with your fingers?

HERAULT: Nothing!

LADY: Don't bend your thumb like that, it's quite obscene!

HERAULT: But you see, the thing's got its own special look.

DANTON: No, Julie, I love you like the grave.

JULIE: (***turning away***) Oh!

DANTON: No, listen! They say there's peace in the grave, peace and the grave are one. If that's true, then, when I lie in your lap, I'm under the earth already. You sweet grave, your lips are my death knell, your voice is the funeral bell, your breast is my burial mound, and your heart my coffin.

LADY: Lost!

HERAULT: That was an amorous adventure, it costs money like all the rest.

LADY: Then you've made your declaration of love like a deaf-mute — with your fingers.

HERAULT: Well, why not. They even claim that those are precisely the easiest to understand. I'm brewing an affair with a playing-card queen; my fingers were princes which had been turned into spiders, you, madam, were the fairy; but it didn't turn out well: the queen was always in childbed, and kept producing to jacks. I wouldn't let my daughter play that sort of game, the kings and queens fall on each other so indecently, and then jacks drop out.

CAMILLE DESMOULINS and PHILIPPEAU enter.

HERAULT: Philippeau, what a gloomy look! Have you torn a hole in your red cap? Did St Jacob scowl at you? Did it rain at the guillotining, or did you get such a bad place that you couldn't see properly.

CAMILLE: You're parodying Socrates. Do you know what the divine philosopher asked Alcibiades when he found him gloomy and downcast one day? "Did you loose your shield in battle? Were you beaten in the footraces or the swordfight? Did someone else sing better or play the lyre better?" What classical Republicans! You could do with a dose of our guillotine Romanticism as an antidote.

PHILIPPEAU: Another twenty victims have fallen today. We were wrong, the Hébertists were only sent to the scaffold because they didn't go about it systematically enough, and perhaps, too, because the Decemvirs thought they were lost, if even for a few days there were men more feared than them.

HERAULT: They want to turn us back into cavemen. St. Just wouldn't mind seeing us crawl around on all fours again, so that the Advocate of Arras could use the mechanism of the Geneva clockmaker to invent safety hats, school benches and a dear God for us!

PHILIPPEAU: These people wouldn't shrink from adding a few noughts to Marat's calculation to that end. How long must we remain covered in dirt and blood like newborn babes, have coffins for cradles and play with human heads. We must progress: the Committee of Clemency must be set up, the expelled Deputies must be reinstated.

HERAULT: The Revolution has reached the stage where it must be reorganized.

The Revolution must cease and the Republic begin. In our constitution, duty must give way to right, virtue to comfort, and punishment to reasonable self-defence. Each man must be able to assert himself and to express his own nature. Whether he's sensible or stupid, educated or uneducated, good or evil, that's no concern of the state. We're all fools, and none of us has the right to force his own particular brand of folly on someone else. Each man must be able to take pleasure in his own way, but in such a way that no one may take pleasure at another's expense and no one may be disturbed in his own particular pleasure.

CAMILLE: The constitution must be a transparent garment, which clings to the body of the People. Each pulse of the veins, each contraction of the muscles, each twitch of the sinews must make its mark. Whether the body is beautiful or ugly, it has the right to be itself. We've no right to fit it with a coat cut to our own taste. The people who want throw a nun's habit over the naked shoulders of our dear sinner France must be rapped on the knuckles.

We want naked gods, bacchanalian women, Olympic games, and melodious lips crying, "Oh, wicked, limb-releasing love."

Let the Romans go on sitting in a corner cooking turnips, but let them give us no more gladiatorial games.

The divine Epicurus and Callipygian Venus must replace saints Marat and Chalier as the gatekeepers of the Republic.

Danton, you will launch the attack at the next meeting of the Convention.

DANTON: I will, you will, he will. If we live to see it! as the old women say. At the end of an hour, sixty minutes will have passed, won't they, my boy?

CAMILLE: What are you on about? That's obvious.

DANTON: Oh, it's all obvious. Who's going to set all these fine things in motion?

PHILIPPEAU: We and the decent folk.

DANTON: That 'and' in the middle is a long word, it keeps us a bit too far apart. The road is long and the decent folk will be out of breath before they meet up with us. Supposing we do meet up! The decent folk, you can lend money to them, you can be godfather to their children and marry your daughters to them, but that's all!

CAMILLE: If that's your view, why did you start the struggle?

DANTON: Those people made me sick. I couldn't look at such pompous Catos without giving them a kick. It's just my nature. (***He gets up.***)

JULIE: Are you going?

DANTON: (***to Julie***) I've got to go, they just drive me mad with their politics.

(***As he goes out***) In passing, let me give you a prophecy: the statue of freedom has not yet been cast, but the furnace is fired and we could all still get our fingers burnt.

(***Off.***)

CAMILLE: Let him go! Do you think he'll be able to keep his fingers out of it when it comes to action?

HERAULT: True, but it would just be to pass the time, like playing chess.

SCENE 2: A Street

SIMON, his WIFE.

SIMON: (***hitting his wife***) You whoremonger, you wrinkled pox-pill, you worm-eaten apple of sin!

WIFE: Hey, help! Help!

People come running.

PEOPLE: Pull 'em apart! Pull 'em apart!

SIMON: No, leave me, Romans, I'm going to smash this bag of bones to pieces. You Vestal!

WIFE: Me a Vestal! That'll be the day!

SIMON: "From your shoulders I will tear your robes.
Into the sun I'll cast your naked corpse."

You mattress for whoring, there's lechery lurking in every wrinkle of your body.

They are separated.

1st CITIZEN: What's the matter?

SIMON: Where *is* the maid? Tell me! No, I can't use that word. The girl! No not that one either. The woman. Not even, not even that one! There's only one name left for her, oh it chokes me. I've no breath to utter it.

2nd CITIZEN: That's good or the name would stink of brandy.

SIMON: Old Virginius, cover your bald head — shame sits upon it like a raven, pecking at your eyes. Give me a knife, Romans! (***He sinks to the ground***.)

WIFE: Oh, he's normally a good man, he just can't hold his drink. The brandy puts a leg under him.

2nd CITIZEN: So he walks around with a third leg.

WIFE: No, he falls over.

2nd CITIZEN: Exactly: first he walks around with a third leg, then he goes down on it, and then it goes down.

SIMON: You're the vampire's tongue that sucks my warmest lifeblood.

WIFE: Leave him to himself, this is where he gets sentimental; it'll pass.

1st CITIZEN: What's the matter, then?

WIFE: You see, I was sat here on this stone in the sun warming myself, you see, 'cos we haven't got any wood, you see —

2nd CITIZEN: Use your husband's nose.

WIFE: And my daughter had gone off round the corner — she's a good girl and provides for her parents.

SIMON: Ha, she confesses!

WIFE: You Judas! Would you even have a pair of trousers to pull up if the young gents didn't take down theirs with her. You brandy keg, do you want to die of thirst when the well runs dry, eh? We work with all the other parts of our body, why not with that one? Her mother laboured with it to bring her into the world, and she had a bad time of it. Can't she labour with it just as well for her mother, eh? And does she have a bad time of it, eh? You blockhead!

SIMON: Ha, Lucretia! A knife, give me a knife, Romans! Ha, Appius Claudius!

1st CITIZEN: Yes, a knife, but not for the poor whore! What has she done? Nothing! It's her hunger that goes whoring and begging. A knife for the people who buy the flesh of our wives and daughters! Woe unto them who whore with the daughters of the People! You've got stomach cramps, and they've got indigestion; you've got holes in your jackets and they've got warm coats; you've got callouses on your knuckles, and they've got hands like velvet. Ergo, you work and they do nothing; ergo, you've earnt it and they've stolen it; ergo, if you want to get back a few pence of your stolen property you have to go whoring and begging; ergo, they're rogues and they must be killed.

3rd CITIZEN: They've got no blood in their veins but what they've sucked out of us. They said to us, "Kill the aristocrats, they're wolves!" We hung the aristocrats from the lanterns. They said, "The Veto is eating your bread." We killed the Veto, they said, "The Girondins are starving you to death", we guillotined the Girondins. But they're the ones who took the clothes from the corpses, and we're left running around bare-legged, just like before, and freezing. We're going to rip the skin off their thighs to make ourselves some trousers. We're going to cut the fat out of them to lard our soup. Let's go! Death to anyone without a hole in his coat!

1st CITIZEN: Death to anyone who can read and write!

2nd CITIZEN: Death to anyone who walks with out-turned feet.

ALL: (***shouting***) Death! Death!

Some of them drag a YOUNG MAN over.

SOME VOICES: He's got a handkerchief! An aristocrat! To the lantern with him! To the lantern!

2nd CITIZEN: What, he doesn't blow his nose with his fingers? To the lantern with him!

A lantern is let down.

Y. MAN: Oh, gentlemen!

2nd CITIZEN: There are no gentlemen here! To the lantern with him!

SOME: (***singing***) "Those who lie in the earth
Are eaten by worms
Better to hang in the air
Than to rot in the grave!"

Y. MAN: Have mercy!

3rd CITIZEN: Just a little game with a loop of rope round your neck! It won't take a moment, we're more merciful than you. Our life is murder by work; for sixty years we hang at the end of the rope wriggling, but now we're going to cut ourselves loose. To the lantern with him!

Y. MAN: Suit yourselves, but you won't see any more clearly for it!

THE ONLOOKERS: Well said! Well said!

SOME VOICES: Let him go!

He escapes.

Enter ROBESPIERRE, accompanied by women and sans-culottes.

ROBESP: What's going on here, citizens.

3rd CITIZEN: What do you think? The few drops of blood from August and September haven't put any colour in the People's cheeks. The guillotine's too slow. We need a downpour.

1st CITIZEN: Our children are crying out for bread, we're going to feed them with the flesh of the aristocrats. Come on! Death to anyone without a hole in his coat!

ALL: Death! Death!

ROBESP: In the name of the law!

1st CITIZEN: What is the law?

ROBESP: The will of the People!

1st CITIZEN: We are the People, and it is our will that there be no law, ergo this will is the law, ergo in the name of the law, there is no more law, ergo death to them!

SOME VOICES: Let Aristides speak, let the Incorruptible speak!

A WOMAN: Hear the Messiah who is come among us to select and to judge; he will smite the wicked with the edge of the sword. His eyes are the eyes of election, his hands are the hands of judgement.

ROBESP: Poor, virtuous People! You do your duty, you sacrifice your enemies. People, you are mighty! You reveal yourself amidst thunders and lightnings. But, People, your strokes must not wound your own body; you are killing yourself in your ferocity. You can fall only through your own strength. Your enemies know that. Your legislators are vigilant, they will guide your hand,

their eyes cannot be deceived, your hands are inescapable. Come with me to the Jacobins! Your brothers will open their arms to you, we will hold a bloody assize for our enemies.

MANY VOICES: To the Jacobins! Long live Robespierre!

All off.

SIMON: Poor me! Abandoned! (***He tries to sit up.***)

WIFE: There now. (***She supports him.***)

SIMON: Oh my Baucis, you heap coals of fire upon my head.

WIFE: Up you get.

SIMON: You're turning away? Ha, can you forgive me, Porcia? Did I strike you? That wasn't my hand, it wasn't my arm, my madness did it.

"His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it."

Where's our daughter, where's my Susie?

WIFE: Just round the corner.

SIMON: Let's to her! Come, my virtuous spouse.

Both off.

SCENE 3: The Jacobin Club

A LYONNAIS: The brothers of Lyons have sent us to pour out to you their bitter indignation. We do not know whether the cart in which Ronsin went to the guillotine was the hearse of freedom, but we do know that since that day the murderers of Chalier are once again walking around confident that they will not end up in the grave. Have you forgotten that Lyons is a stain upon the soil of France that must be obliterated with the bones of traitors? Have you forgotten that the leprosy of this royal whore of a city can only be washed away in the waters of the Rhone? Have you forgotten that Pitt's fleets in the Mediterranean must be driven aground on the corpses of the aristocrats by this river of revolution? Your mercy is murdering the Revolution. Every breath an aristocrat draws is the death rattle of freedom. Only a coward dies for the Republic, a Jacobin kills for it. Know this: if we no longer find in you the vigour of the men of the 10th of August, of September and the 31st of May, then, like Gaillard the patriot, we will have choice but the dagger of Cato.

Applause and confused shouting.

A JACOBIN: We will join with you in drinking the cup of Socrates!

LEGENDRE: (***leaps up onto the podium***) We have no need to look at Lyons. The people who wear clothes of silk, travel in coaches, sit in boxes at the theatre and speak according to the Dictionary of the Academy have been going around for some days with their heads firmly on their necks. They are witty and say that Marat and Chalier deserve a double martyrdom and should be guillotined in effigy.

Uproar in the assembly.

SOME VOICES: They are dead men, they are guillotined by their own tongues.

LEGENDRE: May the blood of these saints fall upon them! I ask the members of the Committee of Public Safety here present, how long they have been so deaf...

COLLOT D'HERBOIS: (***interrupting***) And I ask you, Legendre, whose voice is it that breathes life into such ideas, so that they quicken and dare to speak? It's time to tear off the masks. Listen! The cause is accusing its effect, the cry its echo,

the reason its result. The Committee of Public Safety is better at logic, Legendre. Don't worry! The busts of the saints will remain inviolate, medusa-like they will turn the traitors to stone.

ROBESP: I demand the floor.

THE JACOBINS: Silence, silence for the Incorruptible!

ROBESP: We were only waiting for the cry of indignation to ring out on all sides to speak. Our eyes were open, we saw the enemy arm himself and rise up, but we did not sound the alarm. We allowed the People to keep its own watch, it has not slept, it has taken up arms. We allowed the enemy to break cover, we let him advance; now he stands clear in the open in the bright light of day. Every stroke will hit home, he is dead the moment you catch sight of him.

I have told you before: the internal enemies of the Republic have disintegrated into two factions, as if into two armies. Under banners of differing colour and on the most different of paths, both are rushing towards the same objective. One of these factions is no more. In its affected insanity, it sought cast aside as worn-out weaklings the most proven patriots, in order to rob the Republic of its most powerful arm. It declared war on God and on property, to create a diversion which would favour the kings. It parodied the sublime drama of the Revolution in order to compromise it by calculated excesses. The triumph of Hébert would have thrown the Republic into a state of chaos and despotism was satisfied. The sword of the law has struck down the traitor. But why should that worry the foreigners, as long as there are still criminals of another colour who can be used for the same ends? We have achieved nothing if we still have another faction to destroy.

This faction is the opposite of the other. It urges us towards weakness, its battle-cry is: Mercy! It wants to tear from the People both their weapons and the power which wields those weapons, in order to deliver it, naked and emasculated, to the kings.

The weapon of the Republic is Terror, the power of the Republic is Virtue: Virtue, because without it Terror is destructive; Terror, because without it Virtue is impotent. Terror is an emanation of Virtue, it is nothing but swift, rigorous and unbending justice. They say, Terror is the weapon of a despotic government, and our government thus resembles despotism. True enough! But only in the way that the sword in the hands of the hero of freedom resembles the sabre with which the tyrant's lackey is armed. If the despot rules his brutish subjects through Terror, then he is right, as a despot, to do so. If you destroy by Terror the enemies of freedom, then, as founders of the Republic,

you will be no less right. The revolutionary government is the despotism of freedom against tyranny.

“Mercy for the Royalists!” is the cry in certain quarters. Mercy for the villains? No! Mercy for innocence, mercy for weakness, mercy for the unfortunate, mercy for humanity! It is only the peaceful citizen who can claim the protection of his society. In a republic, only republicans are citizens, Royalists and Foreigners are enemies. To punish the subjugators of humanity is an act of grace; to forgive them is an act of barbarism. All signs of a false sensitivity seem to me to be sighs which fly to England or Austria.

And not satisfied with tearing the weapons from the hands of the People, they attempt to poison the most sacred sources of its power with Vice. Vice is the most subtle, most dangerous and most repugnant attack on freedom. Vice is the mark of Cain which brands the aristocracy. In a republic, Vice is not just a moral, but also a political crime; the man of vice is the political enemy of freedom, and he is all the more of a danger to it, the greater the services he seems to have done it. The most dangerous citizen is the one who more readily uses up a dozen red caps than does a good deed.

You will readily understand me, if you think of people who used to live in garrets and now go about in carriages and fornicate with former marchionesses and baronesses. We may well ask: has the People been robbed or the golden hands of the kings been pressed, when we legislators of the People display all the vices and all the luxury of the former courtiers, when we see these marquesses and counts of the Revolution marry rich women, give luxurious banquets, play cards, keep servants and wear expensive clothes? We may well be astonished when we hear them showing off their wit and culture, and putting on fine manners. Just recently we read an unashamed parody of Tacitus. I could answer with Sallust and play Catalina, but I think no more strokes are needed, the portraits are finished.

No treaty, no armistice with the men who were only intent on plundering the people, who hoped to get away with this plundering unpunished, for whom the Republic is a financial speculation and the Revolution a tool. Put in fear by the rolling tide of examples, they quietly seek to reduce the temperature of justice. One can well imagine each of them saying to himself, “We're not virtuous enough to be so terrible. O philosophical legislators, take pity on our weakness. I do not dare to tell you that I am a man of vice; so I say to you rather: do not be cruel!”

Do not worry, virtuous People, do not worry, you patriots! Tell your brothers in Lyons: the sword of the law shall not rust in the hands to which you have entrusted it! — We will set the Republic a great example...

General applause.

MANY VOICES: Long live the Republic! Long live Robespierre!

CHAIRMAN: The session is adjourned.

SCENE 4: A Street

LACROIX, LEGENDRE.

LACROIX: What have you done, Legendre! Do you know whose head you're toppling with your busts?

LEGENDRE: A few dandies and smart women, that's all.

LACROIX: You're committing suicide, a shadow that kills its original and in doing so kills itself.

LEGENDRE: I don't understand.

LACROIX: I would have thought Collot had spoken clearly.

LEGENDRE: Who cares? He was drunk again.

LACROIX: Fools, children and — well? — drunkards tell the truth. Who do you think Robespierre was referring to when he talked of Catalina?

LEGENDRE: Well?

LACROIX: It's simple: The atheists and ultra-revolutionaries have been sent to the scaffold; but that's no help to the People, they're still running around the streets barefoot wanting to make shoes from the hides of aristocrats. The thermometer of the guillotine cannot be allowed to fall; a few more degrees and the Committee of Public Safety can expect to be put to bed in the Place de la Révolution.

LEGENDRE: And what have my busts got to do with that?

LACROIX: Can you still not see it? You have officially announced the counter-revolution, you have forced the Decemvirs to act, you've guided their hand. The People is a minotaur which must have its corpses every week, if it is not to eat them up.

LEGENDRE: Where's Danton?

LACROIX: Don't ask me! He’s off trying to piece together the Venus de Medici from all the whores of the Palais-Royal; he’s making a mosaic, as he puts it; heaven knows what part of the body he’s on at the moment. It's a great pity that Nature has dismembered beauty, like Medea with her brother, and distributed the pieces among various bodies like that.

Let’s go to the Palais-Royal.

Both off.

SCENE 5: A Room

DANTON, MARION.

MARION: No, leave me alone! Like this, at your feet. I want to tell you something.

DANTON: You could put your lips to better use.

MARION: No, just leave me be for once. My mother was a clever woman, she always told me chastity was a fine virtue. When people came to the house and started talking about certain things, she would order me out of the room; if I asked what the people had wanted, she'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself; if she gave me a book to read, then there were always pages I had to skip. But the Bible I could read to my heart's content, everything in it was holy; but there was something in it I didn't understand, but I didn't want to ask anybody, I brooded on my own. Then spring came, all around me there was something going on that I had no part in. A peculiar mood came over me, it almost stifled me. I looked at my body, sometimes it seemed as if there were two of me, then I melted back into one. A young man used to come to the house at that time; he was good-looking and often said strange things. I didn't really know what he wanted but I couldn't help laughing. My mother asked him to come often, and that suited both of us. In the end we couldn't see why we shouldn't lie between two sheets with one another rather than sit on two chairs next to one another. It gave me more pleasure than his conversation and I couldn't see why I should be allowed the lesser and denied the greater. We did it in secret. And so it went on. But I became like an ocean that swallowed everything up and dug deeper and deeper. For me there was no distinction between one man and another, all men melted into a single body. That was just my nature, who can help that? In the end he noticed. One morning he came and kissed me as if he wanted to suffocate me; his arms tightened around my neck, I was in terrible fear. Then he let go of me and laughed and said he'd almost done something stupid, I should just keep my dress and make the most of it, it would wear out on its own, he didn't want to spoil my fun before time, it was the only thing I had. Then he went. Again I didn't know what he wanted. That evening I sat at the window; I'm very sensitive and feelings are my only contact with the things around me; I lost myself in the waves of the sunset. Then a crowd came down the street, the children ran ahead, the women looked out of the windows. I looked down, they were carrying him past in a

basket, the moon shone on his pale forehead, his curly hair was wet, he'd drowned himself. I couldn't help crying. — That was the only time I felt at odds with myself. Others have Sundays and weekdays, they work for six days and pray on the seventh, once a year, on their birthday, they get sentimental and once a year, at New Year, they reflect on things. I don't understand any of that, for me there's no break, no change. I'm all of a piece. An endless longing and holding, a fire, a torrent. My mother died of grief; people point their fingers at me. That's stupid. In the end it makes no difference what you find your pleasure in, bodies, pictures of Christ, flowers or children's toys; it's the same feeling. The person who enjoys most deeply, prays most deeply.

DANTON: Why can I not completely hold your beauty within me, not completely embrace it?

MARION: Danton, your lips have eyes.

DANTON: I wish I could be part of the æther, in order to bathe you in my current, to break myself on every wave of your beautiful body.

LACROIX, ADELAIDE, ROSALIE enter.

LACROIX: (***stays in the doorway***) I can't help laughing, I can't help laughing.

DANTON: (***reluctantly***) Well?

LACROIX: I just remembered the street.

DANTON: And?

LACROIX: There were some dogs in the street, a mastiff and a Maltese lap-dog, they were really going at it.

DANTON: What of it?

LACROIX: It just occurred to me and I couldn't help laughing. It looked very edifying! The girls were looking out of the windows — people should be careful and not even let them sit in the sun or the gnats will get up to it on their hands, that'll give them ideas.

Legendre and I have been through most of the cells. The Little Sisters of the Revelation through the Flesh hung on our coat-tails and wanted the blessing. Legendre's going through the discipline with one of them now, but he'll have

to abstain for a month for it. Here I bring you two of the priestesses with the Body.

MARION: Hello, demoiselle Adelaide! Hello, demoiselle Rosalie.

ROSALIE: It's a long time since we had the pleasure.

MARION: I was sorry not to see you.

ADELAIDE: Oh God, we're occupied day and night.

DANTON: (***to Rosalie***) My my, little one, you've developed a lovely pair of hips.

ROSALIE: Well, of course, one perfects oneself daily.

LACROIX: What's the difference between a classical and a modern Adonis?

DANTON: And Adelaide has acquired an interesting modesty, a piquant variation. Her face looks like a fig-leaf she's holding in front of her whole body. Such a fig-tree on such a well-used road gives a refreshing shade.

ADELAIDE: I'd be a cattle-track, if monsieur...

DANTON: I understand; but don't be cross, miss.

LACROIX: Listen then! A modern Adonis is torn apart not by a boar, but by sows, he gets his wound not in the thigh but in the groin, and from his blood spring not roses but flowers of mercury.

DANTON: Miss Rosalie is a restored torso, of which only the hips and feet are antique. She's a compass needle: what the head pole repels, the foot pole attracts, the middle is an equator where everyone who crosses the line for the first time needs a baptism of mercury chloride.

LACROIX: Two Sisters of Mercy, each serving in a hospital, namely her own body.

ROSALIE: You should be ashamed of making us blush!

ADELAIDE: You ought to have more manners!

ADELAIDE and ROSALIE off.

DANTON: Good night, pretty children!

LACROIX: Good night, you pits of mercury!

DANTON: I feel sorry for them, they've lost their evening meal.

LACROIX: Listen, Danton, I've just come from the Jacobins.

DANTON: Is that all?

LACROIX: The men from Lyons read out a proclamation; they seemed to think they had no option but to wrap themselves in their togas. Each made a face as if to say to his neighbour, "Paetus, it doesn't hurt." Legendre shouted that people were trying to smash the busts of Chalier and Marat. I think he's trying to bring some colour back to his face. The Terror is over for him, the children pull at his coat in the street.

DANTON: And Robespierre?

LACROIX: Rapped his fingers on the podium and said: Virtue must reign through Terror. The phrase gave me a pain in the neck.

DANTON: It planes wood for the guillotine.

LACROIX: And Collot screamed like a man possessed that the masks must be torn off.

DANTON: And the faces will follow.

PARIS enters.

LACROIX: What news, Fabricius?

PARIS: After I left the Jacobins, I went to Robespierre, I demanded an explanation. He tried to put on a face like Brutus sacrificing his sons. He spoke in general terms of duties, and said: where freedom was concerned he was reckless, he would sacrifice everything, himself, his brother, his friends.

DANTON: That was clear, you only need to reverse the order and he stands at the foot of the scaffold holding the ladder for his friends. We must be grateful to Legendre, he made them speak out.

LACROIX: The Hébertists are not yet dead, and the People are in a materially wretched state, that's a terrible lever. The pan of blood must not be allowed

to rise if it's not to become a lantern for the Committee of Public Safety, it needs ballast, it needs a solid head.

DANTON: I know — the Revolution is like Saturn, it eats its own children.

(***After some consideration***) Still, they won't dare.

LACROIX: Danton, you're a dead saint, but the Revolution has no holy relics, it threw the bones of all the kings into the street and all the statues out of the churches. Do you think you'd be allowed to stand as a monument?

DANTON: My name! The People!

LACROIX: Your name! You're a moderate, I'm one, Camille, Philippeau, Hérault. For the People weakness and moderation are the same thing, they kill the stragglers. The tailors in the Section of the Red Cap will feel the whole of Roman history in their needles if the man of September was moderate to them.

DANTON: Very true, and what is more — the People is like a child, it has to break everything to see what's inside.

LACROIX: And what is more, Danton, we're men of vice, as Robespierre says, i.e. we enjoy; and the People are virtuous, i.e. they do not enjoy, because work dulls their organs of enjoyment; they don't get drunk because they haven't got any money; and they don't go to the brothel, because their breath stinks of cheese and herrings and the girls find it disgusting.

DANTON: They hate the Epicureans the way a eunuch hates men.

LACROIX: They call us rogues and, (***speaking into Danton's ear)*** between you and me, there's a grain of truth in it. Robespierre and the People will be virtuous, St. Just will write a novel, and Barère will tailor a Carmagnole and drape the convention with a coat of blood, and — I can see it all.

DANTON: You're dreaming. They never had courage without me, they won't have any against me. The Revolution isn't over yet, they might still need me, they'll keep me in the arsenal.

LACROIX: We must act.

DANTON: We'll see.

LACROIX: We'll see, when we are lost.

MARION: (***to Danton***) Your lips have grown cold, your words have stifled your kisses.

DANTON: (***to Marion***) So much time to waste? It was worth it!

(***to Lacroix***) Tomorrow I'll go to Robespierre; I'll provoke him, he won't be able to keep quiet then. Tomorrow then! Good night, my friends, good night! I thank you! (***Off.***)

LACROIX: Be off, my dear friends. Be off! Good night, Danton! The thighs of the young lady will guillotine you, her mound of Venus will be your Tarpeian Rock. (***Off.***)

SCENE 6: A Room

ROBESPIERRE, DANTON, PARIS.

ROBESP: I tell you, he who stays my arm when I draw my sword is my enemy, no matter what his intentions. He who prevents me from defending myself kills me as surely as if he himself were to attack me.

DANTON: Where self-defence ends, murder begins. I can see no reason that forces us to keep on killing.

ROBESP: The social revolution is not yet complete; he who leaves a revolution only half finished digs his own grave. The ruling class is not yet dead, the wholesome power of the People must replace this class worn out by excesses of indulgence. Vice must be punished, Virtue must rule by terror.

DANTON: I don't know what you mean by "Punishment".

You and your Virtue, Robespierre! You've never taken bribes, you've never run up debts, you've never slept with a woman, you've always worn a respectable coat and never got drunk. Robespierre, you are infuriatingly upright. I'd be ashamed to walk around for thirty years between heaven and earth with a moral complexion like that, just for the sordid pleasure of looking down on others.

Isn't there anything inside you which occasionally whispers quietly, secretly, "You're lying, you're lying!"

ROBESP: My conscience is clear.

DANTON: Conscience is the mirror an ape squirms in front of. Everyone dolls himself up the best he can and goes in search of a good time in his own way. And everyone may defend himself when someone else spoils his fun. Have you got the right to turn the guillotine into a washtub for other people's dirty linen, and to make scrubbing-brushes for their dirty clothes from their guillotined heads because your coat is always so neatly brushed? Yes, you can defend yourself when they spit on it or tear holes in it, but what concern is it of yours, as long as they leave you in peace. If they don't feel self-conscious going around like that, does that give you the right to lock them

up in the grave? Are you heaven's constable? And if you can't bear the sight of it as well as your dear God, then hold a hanky in front of your eyes.

ROBESP: You deny Virtue?

DANTON: And Vice. We are all Epicureans, some coarse and some fine, Christ was the finest; discriminating; that's the only difference I can find between men. Everyone acts according to his nature, i.e. he does what does him good.

Eh, Incorruptible, it's cruel of me to kick away the heels of your shoes like this, isn't it?

ROBESP: Danton, at certain times Vice is high treason.

DANTON: You can't proscribe it, for heaven's sake, that would be ungrateful — you're too much in its debt — for contrast, I mean.

By the way, to put it in your terms, our "strokes" must be of use to the Republic, one can't strike the innocent along with the guilty.

ROBESP: Who says an innocent man has suffered?

DANTON: Did you hear that, Fabricius? No innocent man has died! (***Goes, saying to Paris:***) We haven't got a moment to lose, we must show ourselves.

Danton and Paris off.

ROBESP: (***alone***) Go, then! He wants to stop the steeds of the Revolution when they reach the brothel, like a coachman with his obedient nags. They'll have the strength to drag him on to the Place de la Révolution.

Kick away the heels of my shoes! To put it in your terms! Stop, stop! Is that what it really is? They'll say his giant figure cast too great a shadow over me and so I told him to step out of the sun.

And what if they were right?

Is it so necessary, then? Yes, yes! the Republic! He must go.

It's ridiculous how my thoughts spy on each other. He must go. He who stands still in a surging crowd offers as much resistance as if he were going against it: he will be trodden underfoot.

We shall not let the ship of Revolution run aground on the shallow calculations and the mudbanks of these people, We must strike off the hand

that dares to hold it, and if he was holding on to it with his teeth...

Away with a faction that has taken the clothes from the dead aristocracy and inherited its leprosy.

No Virtue! Virtue the heel of my shoe. In my terms!

How that keeps coming back.

Why can't I get rid of the idea? It keeps pointing its bloody finger there, there! No matter how many bandages I wrap around it, the blood always seeps through. (***After a pause***) I can't tell which part of me is lying to which.

He goes to the window.

Night snores over the earth and thrashes in a desolate dream. Thoughts, desires, barely suspected, chaotic and formless, which shyly hid from the light of day, now receive shape and form, and sneak into the silent house of dreams. They open the doors, they look out of the windows, they half become flesh, they stretch their limbs in sleep, their lips murmur. — And isn't our waking just a more lucid dream? Are we not sleepwalkers? Are not our actions like those of a dream, only clearer, more definite, more complete? Who can blame us for that? In one hour the mind achieves more deeds in thought than the slothful organism of our body can match in years. Sin lies in thought. Whether the thought is turned into deed, whether the body imitates the mind, that is chance.

ST. JUST appears.

Hey, who's that in the dark! Hey, light, light!

ST. JUST: Do you know my voice?

ROBESP: Oh you, St. Just! (***A maidservant brings light.***)

ST. JUST: Were you alone?

ROBESP: Danton has just left.

ST. JUST: On my way here I bumped into him in the Palais-Royal. He'd put on his revolutionary face and was speaking in epigrams; he was addressing the sans-culottes as 'tu', the whores were running after him, and people stood there whispering to each other what he had said.

We shall lose the advantage of attack. Are you going to hesitate any longer? We shall act without you. We've made up our minds.

ROBESP: What do you intend to do?

ST. JUST: We will call a formal session of the Legislative Committee, the Committee of General Security and the Committee of Public Safety.

ROBESP: A lot of fuss.

ST. JUST: We must bury the great body with respect, like priests, not like murderers. We mustn't mutilate it, all its members must be buried together

ROBESP: Be more explicit.

ST. JUST: We must lay it to rest in full armour, and slay its horses and slaves on the burial mound. Lacroix ...

ROBESP: An out and out rogue, one time advocate's clerk, currently Commander-in-Chief of the French Army Go on!

ST. JUST: Hérault-Séchelles.

ROBESP: A fine head!

ST. JUST: He was the decorative initial on the Bill of the Constitution. We've no further need for such ornament. He will be wiped out. Camille.

ROBESP: Him too?

ST. JUST: (***gives him a document***) That's what I thought. Read this!

ROBESP: Aha, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, is that all? He's a child, he was just having a laugh at you.

ST. JUST: Read this! This! (***Indicates a passage to him.***)

ROBESP: (***Reads***) "This bloody Messiah Robespierre on his Calvary between the two thieves Couthon and Collot, where he sacrifices but is not sacrificed. The Sisters of the Guillotine stand below like Mary and Magdalen. St. Just is close to his heart like John and acquaints the Convention with the apocalyptic revelations of the master; he carries his head like a monstrance."

ST. JUST: I shall make him carry his like St Denis.

ROBESP: (***continues reading***) "Are we supposed to believe that the clean coat of the Messiah is the winding-sheet of France, and those thin fingers of his which twitch when he's on the podium are guillotine blades?

"And you, Barère, who said that in the Place de la Révolution coins would be struck. No I don't want to get the old bag worked up. He is a widow who has already had half a dozen husbands and helped to bury them all. Whose fault is that? It's just his gift, six months before their deaths he can see their Hippocratic faces. Who wants to sit down with corpses and smell their stench?"

You too, then, Camille!

Get rid of them! Quickly! Only the dead do not return. Have you got the indictment ready?

ST. JUST: It won't be a problem. You've already dropped hints at the Jacobin Club.

ROBESP: I was trying to frighten them.

ST. JUST: I only need to put the wheels in motion, the forgers will be the egg and the foreigners the apple. The meal will be the death of them, I give you my word.

ROBESP: Quickly then, tomorrow! No long drawn-out death-throes! I've been feeling on edge for some days. Just do it quickly!

ST. JUST off.

ROBESP: Yes indeed, "Bloody Messiah, who sacrifices but is not sacrificed" — He saved them with his blood, and I'll save them with their own. He made them sinners, and I'll take the sin upon me. He had the ecstasy of pain, and I'll have the torture of the executioner.

Which of us has denied himself more, I or he? —

And yet there's some folly in this idea. —

Why do we only consider the one? Verily, the son of man is crucified in us all, we are all suffering the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating blood, but none redeems the other with his wounds. — My Camille! — They are all going from me — everything is empty and desolate — I am alone.

ACT 2

SCENE 1: A Room

DANTON, LACROIX, PHILIPPEAU, PARIS, CAMILLE.

CAMILLE: Quick, Danton, we've no time to lose!

DANTON: (***dressing***) But time is losing us.

> It's very tedious, always putting your shirt on first and then pulling your trousers on over it, and crawling into bed in the evening and out of it again in the morning, and always putting one foot in front of the other. There's no seeing how it could ever change. It's very sad, and that millions have already done the same and millions will do the same again, not to mention the fact that we consist of two halves, which both do the same, so that everything happens in duplicate. It's very sad.

CAMILLE: You're talking very childishly.

DANTON: The dying often grow childish.

LACROIX: You're heading for disaster with your delay, you're pulling all your friends down with you. Tell the cowards that it's time to rally round you, call upon those on both sides of the Convention. Cry out against the tyranny of the Decemvirs, talk of daggers, invoke Brutus, then you'll frighten the tribunes and gather round you even those who are under threat as accomplices of Hébert. You must give yourself over to your anger. Let's at least not die disarmed and humiliated like the shameful Hébert.

DANTON: You've got a bad memory. You called me a dead saint. You were more right than you thought. I went to see the Sections, they were respectful, like funeral ushers. I'm a holy relic, and relics get thrown out into the street, you were right.

LACROIX: Why did you let it come to that?

DANTON: Come to that? Yes, I suppose I did, in the end I got bored with it. Always running around in the same coat and pulling the same face! It's pitiful. To be such a pathetic instrument with only one string which gives only one note!

It's unbearable! I wanted to make things easy for myself. I've done it: the Revolution will give me rest, but not in the way I thought.

Anyway, what support have we got? Our whores could take on the Sisters of the Guillotine, but I can't think of anything else. You can tick them off on your fingers: the Jacobins have declared that Virtue is the order of the day, the Cordeliers call me Hébert's executioner, the city Commune is doing penance, the Convention — that might still be a way! But there would be another 31st of May, they wouldn't give in easily. Robespierre is the dogma of the Revolution, it can't be cancelled. It wouldn't work either. We didn't make the Revolution, the Revolution made us.

And if it did work — I'd rather be guillotined myself than have others guillotined. I've had enough, why should we human beings fight against one another? We should sit down beside one another and be at peace. Something went wrong when we were created, something's missing in us, I can't find a name for it. We'll never dig it out of each other's entrails, so why should we break open each other's bodies over it? After all, we're wretched alchemists.

CAMILLE: To put it more tragically, you mean: how long is humanity to go on eating its own limbs in its eternal hunger? Or: how long are we castaways, marooned on a wreck, to go on sucking out each other's blood in our unquenchable thirst? Or: how long will we algebraists of the flesh go on writing down our calculations with mangled limbs in search of the unknown x, which always eludes us?

DANTON: You're a strong echo.

CAMILLE: Aren't I? A pistol-shot echoes just like a thunderclap. All the better for you, you should have me at your side all the time.

PHILIPPEAU: And France is left to its executioners?

DANTON: Why not? The people don't mind that. They're miserable, can you ask for more if you want to be sentimental, noble, virtuous or witty, or just to avoid getting bored?

What does it matter whether they die from the guillotine or fever or old age? It's even preferable, they leave the stage with sprightly limbs, go off with a few nice gestures and hear the audience clapping. That's quite civilised, and

it’s appropriate: we’re always in the theatre, even if we end up being stabbed for real.

It’s good for one’s lifespan to be cut down a bit. The coat was too long, our limbs could never fill it. Life becomes an epigram — that’s fine. And who’s got the breath and the spirit for an epic in fifty or sixty cantos? It's time people started drinking the little drop of essence out of liqueur glasses rather than out of tubs. That way at least you get a mouthful, otherwise you can hardly get a few drops to run together in the clumsy barrel.

Finally — I’d have to speak out; that’s just too much trouble, life is not worth the effort one makes to hold on to it.

PARIS: Escape then, Danton!

DANTON: Can you take your country with you on the soles of your shoes? And finally — and this is the main thing: they won’t dare. (***To Camille***) Come, my boy, I tell you, they won’t dare. Goodbye, goodbye!

DANTON and CAMILLE off.

PHILIPPEAU: There he goes.

LACROIX: Not believing a word he said. Sheer laziness. He’d rather be guillotined than make a speech.

PARIS: What’s to be done?

LACROIX: Go home and, like Lucretia, rehearse for a respectable death.

SCENE 2: A Promenade

People out walking, woman with pram.

CITIZEN: My dear Jacqueline, I mean Corn..., I mean Cor...

SIMON: Cornelia, Citizen, Cornelia.

CITIZEN: My dear Cornelia has blessed me with a baby boy.

SIMON: Has borne a son to the Republic.

CITIZEN: To the Republic, that sounds too general — people might think...

SIMON: But that's just the point: the individual must yield to the general...

CITIZEN: Of course, that's what my wife says too.

STREETSINGER: "What is after all, what is after all
The joy and pleasure of all men."

CITIZEN: Oh, the name, I can't make up my mind about that.

SIMON: Call him Pike, Marat!

STREETSINGER: "Among cares, among sorrows
To strive from early morning
Until the day is over."

CITIZEN: I'd like to have three — there's something about the number three — including something practical and something honest. Now I've got it: Plough, Robespierre.

And what about the third one?

SIMON: Pike.

CITIZEN: Thank you, neighbour. Pike, Plough, Robespierre, those are lovely names, that's wonderful.

SIMON: I tell you, the breast of your Cornelia will be like the udders of the Roman she-wolf — no, that doesn't work, Romulus was a tyrant, that doesn't work. (***They pass by.***)

BEGGAR: (***sings***) "A handful of earth
and a little bit of moss..."
Dear sirs, lovely ladies!

1st GENT: Find work, my man, you look quite well fed.

2nd GENT: There! (***Gives him money***) His hand's like velvet. It's outrageous!

BEGGAR: Sir, how did you get your coat?

2nd GENT: By work, by work! You could have one like it, too, I'll give you a job, come to my house, I live...

BEGGAR: Sir, why did you work?

2nd GENT: To get the coat, you fool!

BEGGAR: You put yourself out for a luxury; because a coat like that is a luxury, a rag would serve just as well.

2nd GENT: Certainly, there's no other way.

BEGGAR: And I'm the fool? They cancel out. The sun shines down warmly on the street-corner and it's no effort.

(***Sings***) "A handful of earth
and a little bit of moss..."

ROSALIE: (***to Adelaide***) Come on, there's some soldiers coming! We haven't had anything warm inside us since yesterday.

BEGGAR: (***sings***) "Is on this earth all that I have got."

Gentlemen, Ladies!

SOLDIER: Stop! Where are you off to, my little ones? (To Rosalie) How old are you?

ROSALIE: As old as my little finger.

SOLDIER: You're very sharp.

ROSALIE: And you're very dull.

SOLDIER: Well, I'll sharpen myself on you.

(***He sings***)

"Little Christina, my dear little Christina
Does the wrong hurt you, hurt you
Hurt you, hurt you?"

ROSALIE: (***sings***)

"Oh no, soldiers, sirs.
I'd really like more, like more
Like more, like more."

DANTON and CAMILLE enter.

DANTON: Isn't it entertaining?

I can feel something in the air, it's as if the sun is hatching out lechery.

Doesn't it make you want to jump in, tear your trousers off and cover them from behind like the dogs in the street?

They pass on.

Y. GENT: Oh madam, the sound of a bell, the evening light on the trees, the twinkling of a star...

LADY: The scent of a flower! These natural joys, this pure enjoyment of nature. (***To her daughter***) You see, Eugenie, only Virtue has eyes for such things.

EUGENIE: (***kisses her mother's hand***) Oh, mama, I can see only you.

LADY: Good child!

Y. GENT: (***whispers to Eugenie***) Can you see the pretty lady over there with the old gentleman?

EUGENIE: I know her.

Y. GENT: They say her hairdresser has given her a bun.

EUGENIE: (***laughs***) Wicked gossip!

Y. GENT: The old gent walks by her side. He can see the bud swelling and brings it out into the sun, thinking he is the cloudburst that made it grow.

EUGENIE: How improper. It makes me want to blush.

Y. GENT: That could make me turn pale.

DANTON: (***to Camille***) Don't expect anything serious of me. I don't understand why people don't just stop in the street and laugh in each other's faces. I mean, they ought to be hanging out of the windows and out of the graves laughing, and heaven ought to be bursting and the earth ought to be rolling with laughter.

1ST GENT: I can assure you, an extraordinary discovery! It gives all the technical arts a completely different complexion. Humanity is rushing with giant strides towards its noble destiny.

2ND GENT: Have you seen the new play? A Tower of Babel! A tangle of vaults, stairways, passages and all so easily and boldly tossed into the air. It makes you feel dizzy at every turn.

A bizarre piece.

He stops, in difficulties.

1ST GENT: What's the matter, then?

2ND GENT: Oh, nothing. Your hand, sir! It's the puddle — right. Thank you. That was a close thing, it have could have been dangerous!

1ST GENT: But surely you weren't afraid?

2ND GENT: Yes, the earth is just a thin crust. I always think I might fall through where there's a hole like that.

One must tread carefully, it might crack under your weight. But go to the theatre, I recommend it to you.

SCENE 3: A Room

DANTON, CAMILLE, LUCILE.

CAMILLE: I tell you, if they don't get everything in wooden copies, neatly labelled in theatres, concerts and exhibitions, then they've no eyes or ears for it. If someone carves a marionette, where you can see the strings it's pulled on, and whose joints creak at every step in iambic pentameters — what a character, what profundity! If someone takes a trivial sentiment, an aphorism, a notion and dresses it up in coat and trousers, gives it hands and feet, paints its face and makes the thing torture itself through three acts, until it ends up getting married or shooting itself — perfection! If someone fiddles away at an opera which represents the floating and sinking of the human spirit as well as a clay pipe filled with water represents the nightingale — Oh, the art!

Turn the people out of the theatre into the street: oh, sordid reality!

They turn their backs on the good Lord, preferring a bad copyist. Of creation, which every moment replenishes itself, glowing, surging and sparkling about them and within them, they hear and see nothing. They go to the theatre, read poems and novels, imitate the rogues in them and say to God's creatures: how commonplace!

The Greeks knew what they were talking about, when they said that Pygmalion's statue may have come to life, but she never had any children.

DANTON: And the artists treat nature like David, who in September, when the victims of the massacres were being thrown out of la Force into the street, cold-bloodedly sketched them, saying, "I'm catching the last twitches of life in these wretches."

DANTON is called out.

CAMILLE: What do you say, Lucile?

LUCILE: Nothing, I just like watching you talk.

CAMILLE: And do you hear what I say?

LUCILE: Oh, certainly!

CAMILLE: And am I right? Do you actually know what I said?

LUCILE: No, not really.

DANTON returns.

CAMILLE: What's the matter?

DANTON: The Committee of Public Safety has resolved to arrest me. I've been warned and offered a place of refuge.

They want my head, as if I care. I've had enough of their bungling. Let them take it. What does it matter? I'll know how to die with courage, it'll be easier than living.

CAMILLE: Danton, there's still time!

DANTON: Impossible — but I'd never have thought...

CAMILLE: You and your laziness!

DANTON: I'm not lazy, just tired; I'm eager to be on my way.

CAMILLE: Where are you going?

DANTON: Well, if only we knew!

CAMILLE: Seriously, where?

DANTON: For a walk, my boy, for a walk.

He goes.

LUCILE: Oh, Camille!

CAMILLE: Don't worry, dear child!

LUCILE: When I think that this head will be...! My Camille! This is nonsense, isn't it, I'm mad?

CAMILLE: Don't worry, I'm not Danton.

LUCILE: The earth is vast and there are lots of things on it — why that one in particular? Who has the right to take it from me? That would be wicked. What would they want with it anyway?

CAMILLE: I tell you again: you've no need to worry. I spoke to Robespierre yesterday: he was friendly. There's some tension between us, it's true, differing views, that's all!

LUCILE: Go and see him!

CAMILLE: We sat on the same school-bench. He was always gloomy and lonely. I was the only one to seek out his company and sometimes I made him laugh. He's always shown great affection for me. I'll go.

LUCILE: So soon, my friend? Go on then! Come here! Just that (***she kisses him***) and that! Go, Go!

CAMILLE off.

LUCILE: This is a wicked time. That's the way it is. Who can get away from it? You've got to keep a hold on yourself.

(***Sings.***)

"Oh parting, oh parting, oh parting
Who ever invented parting."

Why should that come into my head. It's not good that it finds its own way there.

As he went out, I felt as if he could never turn back and would always be going further and further away from me, further and further.

How empty the room is. The windows are open, as if a dead body had lain here. I can't stand it here.

She goes.

SCENE 4: Open Ground

DANTON.

DANTON: I don't want to go on. I don't want to disturb this stillness with the clatter of my footsteps and the panting of my breath.

He sits down. After a pause:

Someone told me about a disease that makes you lose your memory. Death is meant to have something of that about it. Then sometimes I find myself hoping that perhaps death's effect is even stronger and makes you lose everything. If that were true!

Then I'd run like a Christian to save my enemy, my memory.

The place is supposed to be safe, well perhaps for my memory, but not for me. For me there's more safety in the grave, at least it will make me forget. It will kill my memory. In that place, though, my memory will live and kill me. Me or it? The answer is simple.

He gets up and turns round.

I'm flirting with Death; it's quite nice to sort of ogle him from a distance with a lorgnon. Really, I can't help laughing about the whole business. There's a feeling of permanence in me which says: tomorrow will be just like today; and the next day and ever after it will all be just as it is now. It's so much empty noise, they're trying to frighten me; they won't dare.

Off.

SCENE 5: A Room

It is night.

DANTON: (***at the window***) Is it never going to stop? Will the light never fade and the sound never die away? Will it never be still and dark, so we can no longer see and hear each other's horrid sins? — September! —

JULIE: (***calls from within***) Danton! Danton!

DANTON: What?

JULIE: (***enters***) What did you call out?

DANTON: Did I call out?

JULIE: You were talking about horrid sins, and then you groaned, "September!"

DANTON: Me, me? No, I didn't say anything. I was hardly even thinking it, they were just quiet, secret thoughts.

JULIE: You're trembling, Danton!

DANTON: And shouldn't I be trembling, when the walls speak like that? When my body is so shattered that my thoughts, restless and wandering, are spoken by lips of stone? That's strange.

JULIE: Georges, my Georges!

DANTON: Yes, Julie, that's very strange. I don't want to think any more, if it speaks out like that. There are thoughts, Julie, for which there should be no ears. It's not good that they cry out the moment they're born, like children. It's not good.

JULIE: God keep you sane! — Georges, Georges, do you recognize me?

DANTON: Well, why not! You're a human being and then a woman and ultimately my wife, and the earth has five continents, Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia, and two and two make four. I'm all there, you see. — Wasn't there a cry of "September"? Didn't you say something like that?

JULIE: Yes, Danton, I could hear it at the other end of the house.

DANTON: As I came over to the window — (***he looks out***) the city is quiet, all the lights are out...

JULIE: There's a child crying nearby.

DANTON: As I came over to the window — a cry went through all the streets and wailed: "September!"

JULIE: You were dreaming, Danton. Get a hold on yourself.

DANTON: Dreaming? Yes, I was dreaming; but that was something different, I'll tell you in a second — my poor head is swimming — in a second! There, now I've got it! The earth's sphere panted under me as it spun, I'd grabbed it like a wild horse, with enormous limbs I grasped its mane and gripped its flanks, my head bent down, my hair fluttering over the abyss. And thus I was carried along. Then I cried out in fear and I woke up. I went over to the window — and that's when I heard it, Julie.

What does the word want with me. Why that one? What have I got to do with it? Why does it stretch out its bloody hands towards me. I didn't coin it.

Oh, help me, Julie, my mind is dull! Wasn't it in September, Julie?

JULIE: The kings were only forty hours from Paris...

DANTON: The fortifications had fallen, the aristocrats in the city...

JULIE: The Republic was lost.

DANTON: Yes, lost. We couldn't leave the enemy at our backs, we'd have been fools: two enemies on one plank, us or them, the stronger pushes off the weaker, that's fair, isn't it?

JULIE: Yes, yes.

DANTON: We slew them, that was no murder, that was civil war.

JULIE: You saved the country.

DANTON: Yes, I did. It was self-defence, we had to. The man on the cross made things easy for himself: "For it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

It must needs be, it was this ‘needs’, this necessity. Who would curse the hand on which the curse of necessity has fallen. Who uttered this necessity, who? What is it in us that lies, whores, steals and murders?

We’re puppets pulled on wires by unknown powers. Nothing, nothing in ourselves. Just the swords that spirits fight with, only you can’t see the hands, just like the fairy tale.

Now I’m calm.

JULIE: Quite calm, my love?

DANTON: Yes, Julie. Come, let’s go to bed.

SCENE 6: Street outside Danton's House

SIMON, MILITIAMEN.

SIMON: How far are we into the night?

1st CITIZEN: What into the night?

SIMON: How far are we into the night?

1st CITIZEN: About as far as between sunset and sunrise.

SIMON: Fool, what time is it?

1st CITIZEN: Look at the face of your watch. It's the time when the pendulums swing up under the bedclothes.

SIMON: We must break in! Come on, citizens! We'll answer for it with our heads. Dead or alive! He's got powerful limbs. I'll go first, citizens.

Make way for freedom!

Look after my wife! I'll bequeath her a wreath of oak-leaves.

1st CITIZEN: A wreath of acorns? I though she got enough acorns falling in her lap every day.

SIMON: Forward, citizens, you will put your country in your debt!

2nd CITIZEN: I wish our country would put itself in our debt; for all the holes we've made in other people's bodies, not a single one of the holes in our trousers has been sewn up.

1st CITIZEN: Do you want your flies sewn up? Ha ha ha!

OTHER CITIZENS: Ha ha ha!

SIMON: Forward, forward!

They break into Danton's house.

SCENE 7: The National Convention

A group of deputies.

LEGENDRE: Is the slaughter of deputies never going to stop?

Who is safe if Danton falls?

DEPUTY: What's to be done?

ANOTHER: He must be heard at the bar of the Convention. That measure is sure to succeed: what can they put up against his voice?

ANOTHER: Impossible, a decree prevents us.

LEGENDRE: It must be revoked or an exception permitted. I shall make the application. I'm counting on your support.

CHAIRMAN: The session is opened.

LEGENDRE: (***ascends the podium***) In the night just gone, four members of the National Convention have been arrested. I know that Danton is one of them, I do not know the names of the rest. But whoever they may be, I demand that they be heard at the bar. Citizens, I declare this: I regard Danton as being as spotless as myself, and I do not believe that any reproach can be made to me. I do not wish to attack any member of the Public Safety or Security Committees, but sound reasons lead me to fear that personal animosity and personal passions might rob Liberty of men who have done her great service. The man who, by his energy, saved France in 1792 deserves to be heard. He must be allowed to account for himself, if he is accused of high treason.

Commotion.

SOME VOICES: We support Legendre's suggestion.

DEPUTY: The deputies are here in the name of the People, we cannot be removed from our seats without the will of our electors.

ANOTHER: Your words smell of corpses, you've taken them from the mouths of the Girondins. Do you want privileges? The axe of the law hangs over every head.

ANOTHER: We cannot allow our committees to send our legislators from the sanctuary of the law to the guillotine.

ANOTHER: Crime has no sanctuary, only crowned criminals find it on the throne.

ANOTHER: Only rogues invoke the right of sanctuary.

ANOTHER: Only murderers do not acknowledge it.

ROBESP: The confusion in this assembly, such as we have not seen for some time proves that great things are afoot. Today it will be decided whether a few men will carry off victory over our country. — How could you deny your principles so far as to grant today to a few individuals what you yesterday denied Chabot, Delaunay and Fabre? What is the meaning of this discrimination in favour of a few men? Why should I be concerned about these eulogies for themselves and their friends? Only too many experiences have shown us what to think of them. We do not enquire whether a man has done this or that patriotic deed, we enquire about his whole political career.

Legendre appears not to know the names of those arrested. The whole Convention knows them. His friend Lacroix is among them. Why does Legendre appear not to know this? Because he well knows that there can be no honest defence of Lacroix. He named only Danton, because he believes that privilege is attached to this name. No, we want no privileges, we want no false gods.

Applause.

What advantage does Danton have over Lafayette, over Dumouriez, over Brissot, Fabre, Chabot, Hébert? What is said of these men that cannot also be said of him? Yet did you spare them? What has he done to earn this preferential treatment above his fellow-citizens? Is it perhaps because a few deceived individuals, and others who did not allow themselves to be deceived, fell in with him in order to make a headlong rush for power and fortune in his retinue? The more he had deceived the patriots who put their trust in him, the more emphatically he must feel the severity of lovers of liberty. They are trying to make you fear a misuse of power which you yourselves have exercised. They protest against the despotism of the

Committees, as if the trust which the People has placed in you and which you have in turn placed in the Committees were not a sufficient guarantee of their patriotism. They pretend to be trembling. But I say to you, the man who trembles at this moment is guilty, for innocence never trembles in the face of public vigilance.

General applause.

They have tried to frighten me too. I was given to understand that the danger, as it approached Danton, could also reach me.

They wrote to me that I was surrounded by friends of Danton, in the belief that the memory of an old attachment, blind faith in feigned virtues, could persuade me to moderate my zeal and my passion for freedom.

But I declare this: nothing will stand in my way, even if Danton's danger should become my own. We all stand in need of a little courage and greatness of soul. Only criminals and the mean of soul are afraid of seeing their like fall at their side, because, when there is no longer a host of accomplices to hide them, they see themselves exposed to the light of truth. But if there are such souls in this assembly, then there are in it also heroic souls. The number of rogues is not great. We need only strike a few heads, and our country is saved.

Applause.

I demand that Legendre's suggestion be rejected.

The deputies all rise to signify unanimous agreement.

ST. JUST: There appear to be in this assembly a few sensitive ears not well able to stand the word "blood". A few general observations may convince them that we are no more cruel than Nature and Time. Nature follows its laws quietly and irresistibly, man is destroyed where he comes into conflict with them. A change in the composition of the air, the flaring up of subterranean fire, a variation in the equilibrium of a body of water, and a plague, a volcanic eruption, a flood bury thousands. What is the result? An insignificant change in physical nature, barely perceptible on the large scale, which would have passed almost without trace, if it were not for corpses in its wake.

I ask you now: is moral nature in its revolutions meant to show more consideration than physical nature? Is an idea not allowed, just as much as a law of physics, to destroy what challenges it? Is an event which redefines the whole constitution of moral nature, that is to say humanity, really not allowed

to go through blood? The spirit of the world makes use of our arms in the spiritual domain, just as it makes use of volcanoes and floods in the physical. What difference does it make whether they die of a plague or the Revolution?

—

The steps of mankind are slow, they can be counted only by centuries, behind each step rise up the graves of generations. The achievement of the simplest inventions and principles has cost the lives of millions who died along the way. Is it not obvious, then, that, at a time when the pace of history is quicker, more men get out of breath.

We will draw a quick and simple conclusion: since all are created under the same conditions, then all are equal, apart from the distinctions which Nature itself has made.

Thus each may have advantages but none may have privileges, neither an individual nor a greater or lesser class of individuals. Every clause in this sentence, when turned into reality, has had its price in deaths. The 14th of July, the 10th of August, the 31st of May are its punctuation marks. It took four years for it to be completed in the physical world, and under normal circumstances it would have taken a century and been punctuated by generations. Is it then surprising that the stream of revolution at every stage, at every new twist throws out its corpses?

We will need to add a few conclusions to our sentence; are a few hundred corpses to prevent us drawing them?

Moses led his people across the Red Sea into the wilderness, until the old corrupted generation had worn itself out, before he founded the new state. Legislators! We have neither the Red Sea nor the wilderness, but we have war and the guillotine.

The Revolution is like the daughters of Pelias: it tears mankind apart in order to rejuvenate it. Mankind will rise up from the cauldron of blood, like the earth from the waters of the Deluge, with limbs of primeval strength, as if created for the first time.

Long, persistent applause. Some deputies get up in their enthusiasm.

ST. JUST: We call upon all the secret enemies of the tyranny, which in Europe and over the whole world carries the dagger of Brutus concealed beneath its garments, to share with us this sublime moment.

The audience and the deputies strike up the Marseillaise.

ACT 3

SCENE 1: The Luxembourg. A Room with Prisoners

CHAUMETTE, PAYNE, MERCIER, HERAULT de SECHELLES and other prisoners.

CHAUMETTE: (***pulls on Payne's sleeve***) Listen, Payne, it could be like that after all, it suddenly struck me just now. I've got a headache today, help me out a bit with your logic, I feel really jittery.

PAYNE: Come on then, philosopher Anaxagoras, I'll catechize you. *There is no* God, because either God created the world or he didn't. If he didn't create it, then the world has its source in itself and there is no God, because God only becomes God by being the source of all being. — But God cannot have created the world, because either creation is eternal like God or it has a beginning. If the latter is the case, then God must have created it at a particular moment, so after God had rested for an eternity he must at some point have become active, i.e. must have undergone a change within himself, which makes him subject to the concept of time, both of which conflict with the nature of God. Thus, God cannot have created the world. Since, however, we know very well that the world or at least our own self exists, and that, according to the foregoing, it must have its source in itself or in something which is not God, then there can be no God. *quod erat demonstrandum*.

CHAUMETTE: My goodness, that makes everything clear again. Thank you, thank you!

MERCIER: Hold on, Payne! What if creation is eternal?

PAYNE: Then it is no longer creation, because either it is one with God or it is an attribute thereof, as Spinoza says; in which case God is in everything, in you, dear fellow, in philosopher Anaxagoras and in me. That wouldn't be so bad, but you must admit that Divine Majesty doesn't exactly amount to much if, within each of us, our dear Lord can have toothache, catch the pox, be buried alive or at least have very unpleasant notions about it.

MERCIER: But there must be a cause.

PAYNE: Who denies this? But who tells you that this cause must be what we think of as God, i.e. perfection? Do you regard the world as perfect?

MERCIER: No.

PAYNE: How are you going to deduce a perfect cause from an imperfect effect?

Voltaire didn't want to be on bad terms with God any more than he did with the kings, that's why he did it. Anyone who has nothing but reason and cannot or dare not even use that consistently is a bungler.

MERCIER: But I ask in return: can a perfect cause have a perfect effect, i.e. can something perfect create something perfect? Is that not impossible, because the created can never have its source in itself, which, however, as you said is an attribute of perfection?

CHAUMETTE: Shut up! Shut up!

PAYNE: Calm down, philosopher!

You are right; but if God has to create at all, and if he can only create something imperfect, then he would be more sensible to forget all about it. Isn't it very human only being able to conceive of God as creating? Because we have to keep stirring and shaking ourselves just to keep on being able to say we exist, do we have to foist the same miserable necessity on God? — Must we immediately assume, when our spirit becomes absorbed in the essence of a harmonious self-contained eternal blessedness, that God has to stretch out his fingers and knead gingerbread men on a table, out of an effusive need of affection, as we whisper secretly to each other? Do we have to do all that just to make ourselves sons of the gods? I prefer a lesser father; at least I won't be able to say of him that he had me brought up beneath him in the pigsties or the galleys.

Get rid of imperfection, only then can you prove the existence of God. Spinoza tried it. You can deny evil, but not pain. Only the intellect can prove God's existence, feeling rebels against it. Take note of this, Anaxagoras: "Why do I suffer?" That is the rock of atheism. The slightest twinge of pain, even if only in a single atom, rips creation apart from top to bottom.

MERCIER: And morality?

PAYNE: First you prove God from morality and then morality from God! What do you want with your morality? I don't know whether there is anything good or evil in itself, and so I have no need to change the way I act. I act according to my nature, what is appropriate to it is good for me and I do it, and what is repellent to it is bad for me and I don't do it and I defend myself against it when it comes my way. You can, as they say, remain virtuous and defend yourself against so-called vice, without having to despise your opponents on that account, which is a very sad notion.

CHAUMETTE: True, very true!

HERAULT: O Philosopher Anaxagoras, you could also say, however: for God to be everything, he must also be his own opposite, i.e. perfect and imperfect, good and evil, immortal and mortal. Admittedly the result of this would be zero, it would all cancel out, we'd end up with nothing.

Be glad! You come out of it all right, you can quite happily worship Madame Momoro as the masterpiece of nature, at least she's left the rosary beads for it in your groin.

CHAUMETTE: I'm most obliged to you, gentlemen!

CHAUMETTE off.

PAYNE: He doesn't believe yet, but when the time comes he'll have the extreme unction, turn his feet towards Mecca and have himself circumcised, to make sure he doesn't miss any path.

DANTON, LACROIX, CAMILLE, PHILIPPEAU are led in.

HERAULT: (***runs up to Danton and embraces him***) Good morning; good night, I should say. I can't ask how you've slept. How will you sleep?

DANTON: Well, you have to go to bed laughing.

MERCIER: (***to Payne***) Look at this mastiff with doves' wings! He's the evil genius of the Revolution. He tried to violate his mother, but she was too strong for him.

PAYNE: His life and his death are equally great misfortunes.

LACROIX: (***to Danton***) I didn't think they'd come so soon.

DANTON: I knew, I'd been warned.

LACROIX: And you didn't say anything?

DANTON: What for? A stroke is the best death, would you want to be ill first? And — I didn't think they'd dare. (***To Hérault***) It's better to lay oneself in the earth than to get corns running about on it. I'd rather have it as a pillow than a stool.

HERAULT: At least we won't have callouses on our fingers when we stroke sweet Dame Putrefaction on the cheeks.

CAMILLE: (***to Danton***) Don't put yourself out. You can stick your tongue out as far as you like but you still won't be able to lick the sweat of death from your brow. — O Lucile! It's a great pity!

The prisoners throng around the new arrivals.

DANTON: (***to Payne***) What you did for the benefit of your country, I have tried to do for mine. I wasn't so lucky, I'm being sent to the scaffold. I don't care, I won't stumble.

MERCIER: (***to Danton***) The blood of the twenty-two will drown you.

PRISONER: (***to Hérault***) The power of the People and the power of reason are one and the same.

PRISONER: (***to Camille***) Well, Procurator General of the Lantern, your improvements in the street-lighting have not made France any brighter.

PRISONER: Leave him be! Those are the lips which spoke the word "mercy".

He embraces CAMILLE, several prisoners follow his example.

PHILIPPEAU: We are priests who have prayed with the dying, we've been infected and are dying of the same plague.

SOME VOICES: The stroke which fells you kills us all.

CAMILLE: Gentlemen, I greatly lament the fact that our efforts were so futile, I'm going to the scaffold because my eyes grew moist at the fate of a few unfortunates.

SCENE 2: A Room

FOUQUIER-TINVILLE, HERRMAN.

FOUQUIER: Everything ready?

HERRMANN: It’s going to be difficult to get away with. If Danton weren’t one of them it would be easy.

FOUQUIER: He must lead the dance.

HERRMANN: He’ll frighten the jury, he’s the scarecrow of the Revolution.

FOUQUIER: The jury will have to want to convict.

HERRMANN: I could suggest a way, but it would offend against legal form.

FOUQUIER: Out with it!

HERRMANN: We don’t draw lots for the jurors, but select those we can count on.

FOUQUIER: That'll work. That will really mow them down. There are nineteen of them. It’s a cunning mixture. The four forgers, then a few bankers and foreigners, and Danton. It's a spicy offering. It’s the sort of thing the people need. — Reliable men, then! Who, for instance?

HERRMANN: Leroi. He’s deaf and so doesn’t hear a word of what the accused have to say. Danton can shout himself hoarse with him.

FOUQUIER: Very good. Carry on!

HERRMANN: Vilatte and Lumiere. One’s always in the pub, the other is always asleep. Both of them only open their mouths to say “guilty”.

Girard works on the principle, that no one brought before the Tribunal can be allowed to escape. Renaudin...

FOUQUIER: Him too? He once helped a few clerics to get off.

HERRMANN: Don’t worry! Only the other day he came to me and demanded that all the condemned should have their blood let before the execution, to make them a bit dopey. He was irritated at the defiant posture most of them adopt.

FOUQUIER: Oh, very good. I’m counting on you, then!

HERRMANN: Just leave it to me!

SCENE 3: The Luxembourg. A Corridor

LACROIX, DANTON, MERCIER and other prisoners walking up and down.

LACROIX: (***to a prisoner***) What, so many unfortunates, and in such a miserable state?

PRISONER: Did the tumbrils not tell you Paris was a slaughtering block?

MERCIER: Eh, Lacroix? Equality swings its scythe over all heads alike, the lava of Revolution flows, the Guillotine republicanises! The galleries are clapping and the Romans are rubbing their hands, but they can't hear that each of these slogans is the death rattle of a victim. Just follow your phrases to the point where they're put into effect.

Look around you, you said all this, it's an exact rendition of your words. These wretches, their executioners and the guillotine are your speeches come to life. You build your system the way Bajazet built his pyramids, with human heads.

DANTON: You're right. Everyone works in human flesh these days. That's the curse of our time. Now my body, too, will be used.

It's a year now since I created the Revolutionary Tribunal. I beg God and Man's forgiveness for it; I wanted to pre-empt further September massacres, I hoped to be able to save the innocent, but this slow murder with its formalities is more horrible and just as inescapable. Gentlemen, I hoped to get you all out of this place.

MERCIER: Oh, we'll be leaving all right.

DANTON: I'm among you now, Heaven knows how it will end.

SCENE 4: The Revolutionary Tribunal

HERRMANN: (***to Danton***) Your name, citizen.

DANTON: The Revolution will tell you my name. My home will soon be in oblivion and my name in the pantheon of history.

HERRMANN: Danton, the Convention accuses you of having conspired with Mirabeau, with Dumouriez, with Orléans, with the Girondins, the foreigners and the faction of Louis XVII.

DANTON: My voice, which I have so often raised in the cause of the people, will rebut this slander without difficulty. Let the wretches who accuse me show their faces and I will cover them in shame. Let the Committees come forward, I will answer before them alone. I need them as accusers and as witnesses.

Let them show themselves.

In any case, why should I concern myself with you and your judgment. I have already told you: oblivion will soon be my sanctuary — life has become a burden to me, you may tear it from me, I long to shake it off.

HERRMANN: Danton, audacity is the mark of crime, composure the mark of innocence.

DANTON: Private audacity is undoubtedly to be censured, but that patriotic audacity which I have displayed so often in the fight for Liberty, is the most creditable of all virtues. This is my audacity, it is this that I here bring to bear for the good of the Republic against my pitiful accusers. Can I remain calm when I see myself slandered in such a base fashion? You cannot expect a cool defence from a revolutionary like me. Men of my stamp are priceless in a revolution, on their brows hovers the genius of Liberty.

Signs of applause among the audience.

I am accused of having conspired with Mirabeau, with Dumouriez, with Orléans, I am accused of having crawled at the feet of miserable despots, I am asked to answer before ineluctable, unbending justice.

St. Just, you wretch, you will be answerable to posterity for this blasphemy.

HERRMANN: I call upon you to answer calmly, remember Marat, he came before his judges with respect.

DANTON: You have laid hands on my whole life, so it is entitled to rise up and confront you; I will bury you beneath the weight of every one of my actions.

I'm not proud of them. Fate guides our hands, but only powerful natures can be its organs.

On the field of Mars I declared war on the monarchy, on the 10th of August I defeated it, on the 21st of January I killed it threw down the a king's head as a gauntlet to the kings. (***Repeated signs of applause. He takes the accusation documents.***)

When I look at this shameful document, I feel my whole being tremble. Who are the people who hand to force Danton to come forth on that memorable day, the 10th of August? Who, then, are these privileged beings from whom he borrow his energy? Let my accusers appear. It's perfectly reasonable of me to demand it. I will unmask these downright scoundrels and hurl them back into the oblivion they should never have crawled out of.

HERRMANN: (***rings the bell***) Can you not hear the bell?

DANTON: The voice of a man defending his honour and his life will drown your bell.

In September I fed the young brood of the Revolution with the dismembered bodies of the aristocrats. From the gold of the aristocrats and the wealthy my voice forged weapons for the People. My voice was the hurricane which buried the lackeys of despotism beneath waves of bayonets.

Loud applause.

HERRMANN: Danton, your voice is exhausted, you are overwrought. You will conclude your defence next time. You need rest.

The session is adjourned.

DANTON: Now you know Danton; a few more hours and he will fall asleep in the arms of fame.

SCENE 5: The Luxembourg. A cell

DILLON, LAFLOTTE, a WARDER.

DILLON: Don’t shine your nose into my face like that, fellow. Ha ha ha!

LAFLOTTE: Keep your mouth shut, your moon's got a halo. Ha ha ha!

WARDER: Ha ha ha! Do you think, sir, you could read by its light? (***Points to a note he is holding in his hand.***)

DILLON: Give it to me!

WARDER: My moon is at low tide.

LAFLOTTE: Your trousers look as if it's high tide.

WARDER: No, they just soak up water. (***To Dillon***) It's gone into hiding in the presence of your sun. You'll have to give me something to make it burn bright again if you want to read by it.

DILLON: There you are, fellow. Clear off.

He gives him some money. WARDER off.

DILLON: (***reads***) Danton has frightened the Tribunal, the jury are in two minds, the audience grumbled. The crowds were extraordinary. The people thronged round the courts and back as far as the bridges. We need a handful of money, a strong arm... hm! hm! (***He walks up and down, pouring himself a drink from a bottle from time to time.***) If I could just get one foot into the street. I’m not going to let myself be slaughtered like this. Yes, just one foot into the street!

LAFLOTTE: And straight into the tumbril, it's the same thing.

DILLON: Do you think so? There’d be a couple of paces inbetween, space enough to fill with the bodies of the Decemvirs — It’s about time the decent folk lifted up their heads.

LAFLOTTE: (***to himself***) All the better, all the easier to strike them. Go on, old fellow, a few more glasses and I'll be laughing.

DILLON: The bastards, the fools, they'll end up even guillotining themselves.

(He goes up and down.)

LAFLOTTE: (***apart***) You could really fall in love with life again, like your own child when you fathered it on yourself. It's not often a man can commit incest with chance and become his own father. Father and child at the same time. A comfortable Œdipus.

DILLON: You can't feed the people with corpses, let the wives of Danton and Camille distribute assignats to the people, that's better than heads.

LAFLOTTE: (***apart***) I wouldn't tear my eyes out afterwards; I might need them to weep for the good general.

DILLON: Their hands on Danton! Who is still safe? Fear will unite them.

LAFLOTTE: He is lost. What does it matter, then, if I step on a corpse to clamber out of the grave?

DILLON: Just one foot in the street! I'll find enough people, old soldiers, Girondins, former nobles; we'll break open the prisons, we'll have to come to terms with the prisoners.

LAFLOTTE: Well, it's true, it does smell of treachery a bit. Who cares? I'd like to try that as well; I've been a bit one-sided up to now. You get pangs of conscience, but it makes a change; it's not *that* unpleasant smelling one's own stench.

I've got bored with the prospect of the guillotine, waiting so long for the thing. I've already been through it twenty times in my mind. There's no spice left in it, it's become quite commonplace.

DILLON: Someone's got to get a note to Danton's wife.

LAFLOTTE: And then — I'm not afraid of death, but of pain. It might hurt, who can promise me otherwise? I know they say it only takes a moment, but pain has a finer timescale, it distinguishes fractions of a second. No! Pain is the only sin, and suffering the only vice, I shall remain virtuous.

DILLON: Listen, Laflotte, where's the fellow got to? I've got money, it must work, we must strike while the iron's hot, my plan is ready.

LAFLOTTE: Wait a moment, wait a moment! I know the jailer, I'll have a word with him. You can count on me, General, we'll get out of this dirty hole, (***to himself as he goes out***) only to land in another: me in the widest, the world, him in the narrowest, the grave.

SCENE 6: The Committee of Public Safety

ST. JUST, BARRERE, COLLOT D'HERBOIS, BILLAUD-VARENNES.

BARRERE: What does Fouquier write?

ST. JUST: The second hearing is over. The prisoners are demanding the appearance of several members of the National Convention and the Committee of Public Safety, they've appealed to the people because they've been denied witnesses. The excitement is apparently indescribable. Danton parodied Jupiter and shook his locks.

COLLOT: All the easier for Samson to get hold of him.

BARRERE: We can't afford to show ourselves, the fishwives and the ragmen might find us less impressive.

BILLAUD: The People has an instinct for letting itself be bullied, even if only with looks, it likes such insolent faces. Foreheads like that are worse than a coat of arms, they wear the fine aristocracy of misanthropy. Everyone who's tired of being looked down upon should help to smash them in.

BARRERE: He's like Siegfried with his horny skin, the blood of the Septembrists has made him invulnerable.

What does Robespierre say?

ST. JUST: He acts as if he's got something to say.

The jury must declare itself sufficiently informed and close the hearings.

BARRERE: Impossible, that won't work.

ST. JUST: They must be got rid of, at any cost, even if we have to strangle them with our own hands. Dare! Danton can't have taught us that word in vain. The Revolution won't stumble over their corpses, but if Danton remains alive, then he'll grab it by the cloak, and there is something about his figure which suggests he might violate Liberty.

ST JUST is called out. A JAILER enters.

JAILER: In St. Pelagie there are prisoners dying, they're demanding a doctor.

BILLAUD: There's no need, all the less trouble for the executioner.

JAILER: There are pregnant women among them.

BILLAUD: All the better, their children won't need coffins.

BARRERE: The aristocracy's consumption will spare the Revolutionary Tribunal a session. Any medicine would be counter-revolutionary.

COLLOT: (***takes a piece of paper***) A petition, a woman's name!

BARRERE: Probably one of those who'd like to be forced to choose between the boards of the guillotine and the bed of a Jacobin. Who will die, like Lucretia, after their loss of honour, but not quite as promptly as the Roman lady, in childbirth or of cancer or old age. It can't be that unpleasant to drive a Tarquinius out of a virgin's republic of virtue.

COLLOT: She's too old. The lady insists on death, she knows how to express herself: prison weighs on her like a coffin-lid. She's only been there four weeks. The answer is simple. (***He writes and reads***) 'Citizen, you haven't been wishing for death long enough'.

JAILER off.

BARRERE: Well said! But, Collot, it's not good that the guillotine's starting to laugh, people won't be afraid of it any more. You mustn't make yourself so familiar.

ST JUST returns.

ST. JUST: I've just received a denunciation. There's a conspiracy in the prisons, a young man by the name of Laflotte has discovered everything. He was in a room with Dillon, Dillon started drinking and talked.

BARRERE: He's cutting his head off with a bottle, he's not the first to do that.

ST. JUST: The wives of Danton and Camille are meant to distribute money among the people, Dillon breaks out, they want to free the prisoners, the Convention is

broken up.

BARRERE: Those are fairy-tales!

ST. JUST: We'll put them to sleep with this fairy-tale. I've got the accusation in my hand; add to that the insolence of the prisoners, the grumbling of the people, the dismay of the jury, I'll make a report.

BARRERE: (***aside***) Yes, go on, St Just, and spin out your sentences, in which every comma is a swordthrust and every full stop a guillotined head!

ST JUST: The Convention must decree that the Revolutionary Tribunal is to continue the trial without interruption and may exclude from the hearings any of the accused who shows fails to show proper respect for the court or causes disruptions.

BARRERE: You've got an instinct for revolution, that sounds very moderate and will still have its effect. They can't keep quiet, Danton can't help shouting.

ST. JUST: I'm counting on your support. There are people in the Convention who are just as sick as Danton and who fear the same cure. They've regained confidence, they will protest about the violation of proper procedure.

BARRERE: (***interrupting him***) I will tell them: in Rome the consul who discovered the Cataline conspiracy and who punished the offenders on the spot with death was himself accused of violation of procedures. Who were his accusers?

COLLOT: (***with feeling***) Go, St. Just! The lava of the revolution is flowing. Liberty in her embrace will suffocate the cowards who want to impregnate her powerful womb, the majesty of the People will appear to them amidst thunder and lightning, like Jupiter before Semele, and turn them to ashes. Go, St Just, we will help you to hurl the thunderbolt at the heads of the cowards.

ST. JUST off.

BARRERE: Did you hear the word "cure". They'll make the guillotine a remedy for the clap yet. They're not fighting the moderates, they're fighting Vice.

BILLAUD: So far our paths have been the same.

BARRERE: Robespierre wants to turn the Revolution into a lecture-room for morality and use the guillotine as a lectern.

BILLAUD: Or a prayer-stool.

COLLOT: On which he won't be standing afterwards but lying.

BARRERE: It will be easy. The world would have to be standing on its head for those so-called rogues to be hanged by the so-called honest folk.

COLLOT: (***to Barère***) When are you coming to Clichy again?

BARRERE: When the doctor's stopped coming to me.

COLLOT: There's a comet over the place, isn't there, under whose singeing rays your spinal cord shrivels up?

BILLAUD: The next thing will be that the sweet fingers of the delightful Demahy will take it out of its covering and make it hang down over his back like a plait.

BARRERE: (***shrugs his shoulders***) Shh! The Virtuous One mustn't know about it.

BILLAUD: He's an impotent Mahommed.

BILLAUD and COLLOT off.

BARRERE: (***alone***) The monsters! "You haven't been wishing for death long enough!" Words like that should have shrivelled up the tongue that spoke them.

And me?

When the Septembrists were breaking into the prisons, a prisoner grasps his knife, he mingles with the murderers and stabs a priest in the chest with it, he is saved!

Who can object to that? Whether I mingle with the murderers or get on to the Committee of Public Safety, whether I take a guillotine blade or a pocket-knife? The case is the same, only the details are a bit more complicated, the basic situation is the same.

And if he's allowed to murder one, is he also allowed to murder two, three, or even more? where does it stop? Here we go with the grains of barley, do two make a heap, three, four, how many, then? Come, my conscience, come my little chicken, come, tt tt tt, here's food for you!

And yet — was I a prisoner, too? I was under suspicion, it comes to the same thing, my death was certain.

Off.

SCENE 7: The Conciergerie

LACROIX, DANTON, PHILIPPEAU, CAMILLE.

LACROIX: You shouted well, Danton; if you'd really made such an effort to save your life a bit sooner, things would be different now. It makes a difference, doesn't it, when death comes so shamelessly close to you, with its bad breath, and gets more and more insistent?

CAMILLE: If it just assaulted you and seized his prize from your hot limbs with a fierce struggle! But like this, with all these formalities, it's like getting married to an old woman, the way the contracts are drawn up, the witnesses called, the amen said and then the blanket lifted and she creeps into your bed with her cold limbs!

DANTON: If only it was a fight, with arms and teeth locked in combat. But I feel as if I've fallen into a mill, and my limbs are being slowly and systematically twisted off by the cold physical power. To be killed so mechanically!

CAMILLE: To lie there alone, cold, stiff in the damp vapours of corruption; perhaps death slowly tortures the life out of your fibres, perhaps you rot away with full consciousness!

PHILIPPEAU: Don't worry, my friends. We're the autumn crocus which only bears seeds after the winter. The only difference between us and flowers that are replanted is that we stink a bit in the process. Is that so bad?

DANTON: An edifying prospect! From one dung-heap onto the other! The divine taxonomy. From the first class to the second, from the second to the third and so on? I've had enough of school benches, I've got callouses on my arse from sitting there like an ape.

PHILIPPEAU: What do you want, then?

DANTON: Peace.

PHILIPPEAU: That is in God.

DANTON: In oblivion. Immerse yourself in something more peaceful than oblivion, and if the greatest peace is God, then isn't oblivion God? But I'm an atheist. The accursed maxim: something cannot become nothing! and I am something, that's the pity!

Creation has spread itself so wide, there's nowhere empty, everywhere is teeming.

Oblivion has murdered itself, creation is its wound, we are drops of its blood, the world is the grave in which it rots.

That sounds mad, but there is some truth in it.

CAMILLE: The world is the wandering Jew, oblivion is death, but it's not possible. Oh, not to be able to die, not to be able to die! as the old song says.

DANTON: We're all buried alive and laid to rest like kings in three- or four-layered coffins, beneath the sky, in our houses, in our coats and shirts.

For fifty years we scratch at the coffin-lid. Yes, the man who could believe in annihilation, he'd be all right.

There's no hope in death; it's only a simpler form of putrefaction, and life a more complicated, more organized one, that's all the difference!

But I just happen to be used to this form of putrefaction; the devil knows how I'll get used to the other one.

Oh, Julie! If I went *alone*! If she abandoned me!

And if I disintegrated completely, dissolved completely, I'd still be a handful of tortured dust, and each of my atoms could find peace only with her.

I can't die, no, I can't die. We must cry out, they'll have to tear every drop of life from my limbs.

SCENE 8: A Room

FOUQUIER, AMAR, VOULAND.

FOUQUIER: I just don’t know what to say any more, they're demanding an enquiry.

AMAR: We’ve got the rogues, here’s what you want.

He gives FOUQUIER a document.

VOULAND: That will satisfy them.

FOUQUIER: Oh yes, that’s what we needed.

AMAR: Now make sure that the business is finally settled for us and for them.

SCENE 9: The Revolutionary Tribunal

DANTON: The Republic is in danger, and he has no instructions! We appeal to the People; my voice is still strong enough to deliver the funeral oration of the Decemvirs.

I repeat, we demand a commission, we have important discoveries to make. I shall withdraw to the citadel of reason, I shall break out with the canon of truth and crush my enemies.

Signs of applause.

FOUQUIER, AMAR, VOULAND enter.

FOUQUIER: Silence in the name of the Republic, respect for the law! The Convention has resolved:

In consideration of the fact that there are signs of mutiny in the prisons, in consideration of the fact that the wives of Danton and Camille intend to distribute money among the people and that General Dillon intends to break out and place himself at the head of the rebels in order to release the accused, and finally in consideration of the fact that the aforementioned have themselves striven to bring about disruption and attempted to insult the Tribunal, the Tribunal is empowered to continue the examination without interruption and to exclude from the hearings any of the accused who fails to show due respect for the law!

DANTON: I ask those present, whether we have mocked the Tribunal, the People or the National Convention?

MANY VOICES: No! No!

CAMILLE: The wretches, they are trying to murder my Lucile!

DANTON: One day the truth will be acknowledged. I see great misfortune coming over France. This is dictatorship. It has torn asunder its veil, it bears its head high, it is marching over our corpses. (***Pointing to AMAR and VOULAND***) Look at the cowardly murderers, look at the ravens of the Committee of Public Safety!

I accuse Robespierre, St. Just and their executioners of high treason.

They are trying to choke the Republic with blood. The tracks of the tumbrils are the military road along which the foreigners are to penetrate into the heart of our nation.

How long must the footprints of Liberty be graves?

You want bread, and they throw you heads! You are thirsty and they make you lick the blood from the steps of the guillotine.

Great tumult among the audience, shouts of applause.

MANY VOICES: Long live Danton! Down with the Decemvirs!

The prisoners are removed by force.

SCENE 10: Outside the Palais de Justice

A throng of people.

SOME VOICES: Down with the Decemvirs! Long live Danton!

1st CITIZEN: Yes, it's true, heads instead of bread, blood instead of wine!

SOME WOMEN: The guillotine's a bad mill and Samson a bad baker's lad, we want bread, bread!

2nd CITIZEN: Your bread's been eaten by Danton. His head will give you all bread again, he was right.

1st CITIZEN: Danton was among us on the 10th of August, Danton was among us in September. Where were the people who have accused him?

2nd CITIZEN: And Lafayette was with us in Versailles and was still a traitor.

1st CITIZEN: Who says Danton's a traitor?

2nd CITIZEN: Robespierre.

1st CITIZEN: And Robespierre is a traitor!

2nd CITIZEN: Who says so?

1st CITIZEN: Danton.

2nd CITIZEN: Danton's got beautiful clothes, Danton's got a beautiful house, Danton's got a beautiful wife, he bathes in Burgundy, eats game from silver platters and sleeps with your wives and daughters, when he's drunk. Danton was poor like you. Where's he got it all from?

The Veto bought it for him, so he'd save the crown for him.

The Duke of Orléans gave it to him, so that he'd steal the crown for him.

The foreigners gave it to him, so that he'd betray you all. What has Robespierre got? virtuous Robespierre. You all know him.

ALL: Long live Robespierre! Down with Danton! Down with the traitor.

ACT 4

SCENE 1: A Room

JULIE, a BOY.

JULIE: It's over. They were afraid of him. They're killing him out of fear. Go! I've seen him for the last time, tell him I couldn't face seeing him like *that*.

She gives the BOY a lock of her hair.

There, take this to him and tell him he won't be going alone. He'll know what I mean, and then come back quickly, I want to read his look from your eyes.

SCENE 2: A Street

DUMAS, a citizen.

CITIZEN: How can so many unfortunates be sentenced to death after a trial like that?

DUMAS: It is indeed extraordinary, but the men of the Revolution have an instinct that others do not, and this instinct never deceives them.

CITIZEN: That's the instinct of the tiger. — You've got a wife.

DUMAS: Soon I will have had one.

CITIZEN: So it's true then!

DUMAS: The Revolutionary Tribunal will announce our divorce, the guillotine separate us from bed and board.

CITIZEN: You're a monster!

DUMAS: Dullard! You admire Brutus?

CITIZEN: With all my soul.

DUMAS: Does one have to be a Roman consul and be able to cover one's head with the toga to sacrifice one's dearest for the fatherland? I will wipe my eyes with the sleeves of my red coat, that's the only difference.

CITIZEN: That's detestable.

DUMAS: Really, you don't understand me.

They go off.

SCENE 3: La Conciergerie

LACROIX, HERAULT (on one bed). DANTON, CAMILLE (on another).

LACROIX: Your hair grows so, and your nails, it really makes you feel ashamed of yourself.

HERAULT: Be a bit more careful, every time you sneeze I get a faceful of grit.

LACROIX: And don't tread on my feet like that, my friend, I've got corns.

HERAULT: You've still got lice.

LACROIX: Oh, if I could just get completely rid of the beasts!

HERAULT: Well, sleep well, we'll have to see how we get on with each other, we haven't got much room.

Don't scratch me with your nails in your sleep. There! Don't pull on the shroud like that, it's cold!

DANTON: Yes, Camille, tomorrow we'll be worn-out shoes thrown into the lap of that beggarwoman Earth.

CAMILLE: The cowhide which, according to Plato, the angels made their slippers from to grope their way around the Earth. Just what you'd expect. My Lucile!

DANTON: Calm down, my boy!

CAMILLE: Can I? Do you think so, Danton? Can I? They can't lay a hand on her! The light of beauty which pours forth from her sweet body is inextinguishable. Impossible! No, the earth would not dare to consume her, it would arch above her, the vapour of the grave would sparkle like dew on her lashes, crystals would sprout like flowers around her limbs and bright springs would lull her to sleep.

DANTON: Sleep, my boy, sleep!

CAMILLE: Listen, Danton, between you and me, it's so wretched having to die. It doesn't get us anywhere. I want to steal the last glances from the lovely eyes of life, I want my eyes to be open.

DANTON: You'll keep them open anyway. Samson doesn't close your eyes for you. Sleep is more merciful. Sleep, my boy, sleep!

CAMILLE: Lucile, your kisses play upon my lips; every kiss becomes a dream, my eyes close and hold it in.

DANTON: Will the clock never rest? With every tick it pushes the walls in closer around me, until they're as narrow as a coffin.

I once read a story like that when I was a child, it made my hair stand on end.

Yes, when I was a child! It was worth the trouble, feeding me up and keeping me warm. Just work for the gravedigger!

I feel as if I stink already. My dear body, I'll hold my nose and pretend you're a lady who's sweaty from dancing and stinks, and I'll pay you compliments. We've spent quite some time together till now.

Tomorrow you'll be a broken fiddle, the melody on it played out. Tomorrow you'll be an empty bottle, the wine's all drunk but it's had no effect on me and I'll go sober to bed. They're lucky people who can still get drunk. Tomorrow you'll be a worn-out pair of trousers, you'll be thrown into the wardrobe and the moths will eat you, no matter how much you stink.

Oh, that doesn't help. Oh yes, it's so wretched having to die. Death mimics birth, when we die we're as naked and helpless as newborn babes.

We even get a winding-sheet for swaddling clothes. What use will it be? We can whimper as well in the grave as we can in the cot.

Camille! He's asleep, (***bending over him***) a dream plays between his eyelids. I shan't wipe the golden dew of sleep from his eyes.

He gets up and goes to the window.

I shan't be going alone, thank you, Julie! But I would have liked to die differently, quite effortlessly, the way a star falls, the way a note dies away, kisses itself to death with its own lips, the way a beam of light buries itself in clear waters. —

The stars are sprinkled across the night like shimmering tears, there must be a great sorrow in the eye from which they fell.

CAMILLE: Oh! (***He has sat up and is reaching out for the ceiling.***)

DANTON: What's the matter, Camille?

CAMILLE: Oh, oh!

DANTON: (***shakes him***) Are you trying to tear down the ceiling?

CAMILLE: Oh, you, you, oh, hold me, speak, you!

DANTON: You're shaking all over, there's sweat on your forehead.

CAMILLE: It's you that I, there! That's my hand! yes, now I'm coming to my senses. Oh Danton, that was terrible!

DANTON: What was?

CAMILLE: I lay between dream and waking. Then the ceiling disappeared and the moon came down, very near, very close, my arm took hold of it. The firmament with its lights had come down, I pushed against it, I touched the stars, I reeled like a drowning man beneath a sheet of ice. It was terrible, Danton!

DANTON: The lamp's casting a circle of light onto the ceiling, that's what you saw.

CAMILLE: I suppose so, it doesn't exactly take much to rob a man of the little reason he's got. Madness had got me by the scruff of the neck. (***He gets up.***) I don't want to sleep any more, I don't want to go mad. (***He reaches out for a book.***)

DANTON: What's that?

CAMILLE: *Night Thoughts*.

DANTON: Do you want to die in advance? I'll have *La Pucelle*. I don't want to leave life as if it's a prayer-stool, but as if it's the bed of a Sister of Mercy. Life's a whore, it fornicates with the whole world.

SCENE 4: Outside the Conciergerie

A JAILER, TWO CARTERS with carts, WOMEN.

JAILER: What are you doing ‘ere?

1st CARTER: Ear? I’m not called Ear, that's a funny name!

JAILER: Idiot, who commissioned you?

1st CARTER: I don’t know anything about commission, I just get ten sous a head.

2nd CARTER: The bastard’s trying to do me out of my bread.

1st CARTER: What are you calling your bread? (***Pointing to the windows of the prisoners***) That’s worm-fodder.

2nd CARTER: My kids are worms too, and they want their share of it, too. Oh, it’s a hard life in our line of work, and yet we’re the best drivers.

1st CARTER: What do you mean?

2nd CARTER: Who’s the best driver?

1st CARTER: The one who drives furthest and fastest.

2nd CARTER: Well, you dolt, who drives further than the man who drives out of this world, and who drives faster than the man who does it in a quarter of an hour? It’s precisely a quarter of an hour from here to the Place de la Révolution.

JAILER: Hurry up, you lazy sods! Nearer the gate. Make way, girls!

1st CARTER: Stay where you are! You don’t drive round a girl, you always go up the middle.

2nd CARTER: Yes, I believe it, you can drive in there with your horse and cart, and you’ll find a smooth passage, but you’ll have to go into quarantine when you come out.

They drive forwards.

1st CARTER: (***to the women***) What are you gawping at?

WOMAN: We're waiting for some old customers.

1st CARTER: Do you think my cart's a brothel? It's a respectable cart, it's carried the king and all the fine gentlemen from Paris to the dinner-table.

Enter LUCILE. She sits on a stone beneath the prisoners' window.

LUCILE: Camille, Camille!

CAMILLE appears at the window.

Listen, Camille, you make me laugh with your long stone coat and the iron mask in front of your face, can't you bend down? Where are your arms?

I will catch you with song, dear little bird.

(***Sings***)
"There are two little stars in the sky
Shining brighter than the moon
One shines in front of darling's window
The other in front of the chamber door."

Come, come, my friend! Quietly up the stairs, they're all asleep. The moon's been helping me to wait so long. But you can't get in the door, that's an awful costume. That 's too bad for the fun, stop it. You're not moving either, why don't you speak? You frighten me.

Listen! People are saying you've got to die and putting on such serious faces.

Die! I can't help laughing at their faces. Die! What sort of word is that? Tell me, Camille. Die! I want to think about it. There, that's it. I'll run after him; come, my sweet friend, help me catch him, come! come!

She runs off.

CAMILLE: (***calls***) Lucile! Lucile!

SCENE 5: The Conciergerie

DANTON (at a window to the next room), CAMILLE, PHILIPPEAU, LACROIX, HERAULT.

DANTON: You're quiet now, Fabre.

A VOICE: (***from within***) Dying.

DANTON: And do you know what we're going to make now?

VOICE: Well?

DANTON: What you've done all your life — *des vers*.

CAMILLE: (***aside***) There was madness at the back of her eyes. She's not the first one to go mad. It's the way of the world. What can we do about it? We wash our hands. It's better that way.

DANTON: I'm leaving everything in a terrible mess. None of them knows how to govern. It might still work if I left my whores to Robespierre and my legs to Couthon.

LACROIX: We'd have turned Liberty into a whore!

DANTON: What difference would that make! Liberty and a whore are the most cosmopolitan things under the sun. Now Liberty can prostitute herself respectably in the marriage-bed of the Advocate of Arras. But I think she'll play Clytemnestra against him; I don't give him more than six months, I'll drag him with me.

CAMILLE: (***aside***) May heaven help her to find a comfortable obsession. The everyday obsessions which are dubbed common sense are unbearably tedious. The happiest man was the one who could imagine he was Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

LACROIX: The dolts will shout 'Long live the Republic' as we pass.

DANTON: What does that matter? The deluge of the Revolution can dump our bodies wherever it wants, but people will still be able to smash the skull of every king with our fossilised bones.

HERAULT: Yes, as long as there's a Samson around for our jawbones.

DANTON: They're Cains.

LACROIX: Nothing proves better that Robespierre is a Nero than the fact that he was never more friendly to Camille than two days before his arrest. Isn't that so, Camille?

CAMILLE: If you say so, why should I care?

What a sweet things she has made of her madness! Why do I have to go now? Together we'd have laughed with him, rocked him in the cradle and kissed him.

DANTON: If history ever open its graves, despotism might still choke to death on the smell of our corpses.

HERAULT: We stank quite enough while we were alive.

These are phrases for posterity, eh, Danton, they're really no concern of ours.

CAMILLE: He's pulling a face as if it might be turned to stone and dug up by posterity as an antiquity.

It's not worth the trouble, either, pouting and putting on rouge and speaking with a posh accent. We ought to take off our masks for once, then everywhere we'd see, as if in a room with mirrors everywhere, only a single, primeval, infinitely repeated, imperishable blockhead, nothing more, nothing less. The differences aren't that great, we're all rogues and angels, idiots and geniuses, and all at the same time, too: these four can all find room enough in the same body, they're not as bulky as one imagines.

Sleeping, digesting, producing children, we all do these, the rest is just variations in different keys on the same theme. So we have to stand on tiptoe and make faces, so we have to feel embarrassed in front of others? We've all eaten ourselves sick at the same table and got stomach ache, what are you holding your napkins in front of your faces for? Just scream and cry, as it takes you!

Just don't put on such virtuous and clever and heroic and genial expressions, we know each other after all, save yourselves the trouble.

HERAULT: Yes, Camille, let's sit down side by side and cry out, there's nothing more stupid than keeping your lips tightly shut when something hurts you.

Greeks and Gods cried out, Romans and Stoics put on the heroic look.

DANTON: The ones were as much Epicureans as the others. They managed to give themselves a nice feeling of self-satisfaction. It's not so bad to arrange one's toga and look to see if one casts a long shadow. Why should we argue? What does it matter whether we cover our privates in laurels, or rosaries, or vine-leaves, or just wear the ugly things openly and let the dogs lick at them?

PHILIPPEAU: My friends, you don't need to stand very high above the earth to see no more of all this confused reeling and flickering and for your eyes to be filled with a few great, divine lines.

There is an ear to which the confused shouting and pandemonium which deafens us is a stream of harmonies.

DANTON: But we're the poor musicians and our bodies are the instruments. Are the hideous notes scraped out of them only there to penetrate higher and higher until they eventually die away like an ecstatic breath in heavenly ears?

HERAULT: Are we like piglets who are whipped to death with sticks for princely tables so that their meat tastes better?

DANTON: Are we children roasted in the burning arms of the Moloch of this world, and tickled with rays of light, so that the gods can delight in their laughter?

CAMILLE: Is the æther with its goldeneyes a bowl with golden carp which sits on the table of the immortal gods, and the immortal gods are eternally laughing and the fish are eternally dying, and the gods take eternal delight in the colourful spectacle of the death-struggle?

DANTON: The world is Chaos. Oblivion is the god of the world yet to be born.

The JAILER comes in.

JAILER: Gentlemen, you may depart, the carriages are waiting at the door.

LACROIX: Good night, my friends! Let us calmly draw over us the great cover beneath which all hearts cool and all eyes fall shut.

They embrace each other.

HERAULT: (***taking CAMILLE'S arm***) Be glad, Camille, we've got a lovely night. The clouds hang in the silent evening sky like a cooling Mount Olympus with expiring, sinking gods.

They go off.

SCENE 6: A Room

JULIE: The People were running through the streets, now everything is quiet.

I don't want to let him wait a moment.

She gets out a phial.

Come, dearest priest, whose amen sends us to bed.

She goes to the window.

It's so sweet to say goodbye, all I've got to do is close the door behind me.

She drinks.

To stand like this for ever!

The sun's gone down. The earth's features were so strong in its light, but now its face is as calm and solemn as that of a dying woman. How beautifully the light of evening plays on her brow and cheeks. Paler and paler she grows, like a corpse she drifts down the river of the æther; will no arm catch her by her golden tresses, lift her from the water and bury her?

I'll go gently. I won't kiss her, so that no breath, no sigh shall wake her from her slumbers.

Sleep. Sleep.

She dies.

SCENE 7: La Place de la Révolution

The carts drive up and stop in front of the guillotine. Men and women are singing and dancing the Carmagnole. The prisoners strike up the Marseillaise.

WOMAN WITH CHILDREN: Make way! Make way! My kids are screaming that they're hungry. I've got to make them watch, so they'll shut up. Make way!

A WOMAN: Hey, Danton, now you can fornicate with the worms!

ANOTHER WOMAN: Hérault, I'm going to get myself a wig made out of your lovely hair.

HERAULT: I haven't got enough woodland to cover such a deforested mound of Venus.

CAMILLE: Damned hags! One day you'll be shouting "Ye mountains fall upon us!"

A WOMAN: The mountain's fallen on you, or rather you've fallen under it.

DANTON: (*to Camille*) Calm down, my boy, you've shouted yourself hoarse.

CAMILLE: (*gives money to the carter*) There, old Charon, your cart is a fine platter.

Gentlemen, I will serve myself first. This is a classical banquet, we lie on our couches and sprinkle a little blood by way of libation. Adieu, Danton!

He ascends the scaffold, the prisoners follow him, one after the other. Danton comes last.

LACROIX: (*to the crowd*) You're killing us on the day you've lost your reason. You'll kill them on the day you get it back.

SOME VOICES: We've heard that one before. How boring!

LACROIX: The tyrants will trip on our graves and break their necks.

HERAULT: (*to Danton*) He sees his corpse as a compost-heap for Liberty.

PHILIPPEAU: (***on the scaffold***) I forgive you; may your hour of death be no more bitter than mine.

HERAULT: Just as I thought, he has to reach under his shirt again and show the people down there he's got clean underwear.

FABRE: Farewell, Danton! This is a double death.

DANTON: Adieu, my friend! The guillotine is the best doctor.

HERAULT: (***tries to embrace Danton***) Oh, Danton, I can't even manage a joke. The time has come. (***An EXECUTIONER pushes him back.***)

DANTON: (***to the EXECUTIONER***) Are you trying to be crueller than death? Can you stop our heads kissing at the bottom of the basket?

SCENE 8: A Street

LUCILE: There's something almost serious about it after all. I want to just think about it. I'm beginning to understand the sort of thing. "Die" — "die" —

Everything is allowed to live, everything, that little midge there, that bird. So why not him? The stream of life would have to come to a standstill, if even a single drop were spilt. The earth couldn't help but be wounded by such a stroke.

Everything is in motion, the clocks are striking, the bells are ringing, the people are running, the water's flowing, and everything, everything goes on until then, then — no! it must not be allowed to happen, no — I'll sit on the ground and cry out so that everything stands still in fright, everything stops, nothing stirs any more. (***She sits down, covers her eyes and lets out a scream. After a pause she gets up.***)

It doesn't make any difference, everything's just as it was, the houses, the street, the wind's blowing, the clouds passing. — I suppose we have to put up with it.

Some WOMEN come down the street.

1st WOMAN: A good-looking man, that Hérault!

2nd WOMAN: The way he stood by the triumphal arch at the Festival of the Constitution, I thought then, there's one who'll look good on the guillotine, I thought. I had a feeling about it.

3rd WOMAN: Yes, you've got to see people in all situations. It's good that dying's getting so public.

They pass by.

LUCILE: My Camille! Where should I seek you now?

SCENE 9: La Place de la Révolution

TWO EXECUTIONERS, busy at the guillotine.

1st EXEC: (***stands on the guillotine and sings***)

"And when I go home
The moon shines so beautifully"

2nd EXEC: Hey there! You almost finished?

1st EXEC: In a minute, in a minute!

(***Sings***) "Shines in my grandfather's window
Lad, where have you been among men all this time."

Right! Give us me jacket!

They go off singing

"And when I go home
The moon shines so beautifully"

LUCILE enters and sits on the steps of the guillotine.

LUCILE: I'll sit in your lap, you silent angel of death.

(***Sings***) "There is a reaper, he's called Death
Has authority from God most high"

You dear cradle, who have rocked my Camille to sleep, have smothered him among your roses.

You funeral bell, who sang him with your sweet tongue into his grave.

(***She sings***)

"Many uncounted hundred thousands,
They fall beneath the scythe."

A patrol appears.

CITIZEN: Hey, who goes there?

LUCILE: Long live the King!

CITIZEN: In the name of the Republic!

She is surrounded by the patrol and led away.